

## FRENCH GAMES - pétanque and jeu provençal

### Pétanque



*The new plaquette in La Ciotat  
(Wilhelmus Nanninga)*

*The famous Place des Lices in  
St-Tropez in the French  
Provence (postcard - La  
Cigogne)*



*The old plaquette in La  
Ciotat (Jac Verheul)*



Pétanque is the latest branch on the enormous tree of jeu de boules. Probably created in 1907 or 1910 in La Ciotat by Jules le Noir (there are

several versions of the birth of pétanque, but the version of Jules le Noir is the most probable one). The ancestor of pétanque was the game jeu provençal (see further on). Ernest Pitiot organised, some weeks after the birth of the new game, the first tournament and founded in 1945 the French Pétanque Federation Fédération Française de Pétanque et Jeu Provençal (FFPJP). Till then, pétanque and jeu provençal (and the games of boule des berges and boule en bois) formed part of the FFB, the Fédération Française de Boules. The FFB was dominated then by the game of boule lyonnaise with almost 130.000 players in 1945 and there were a lot of quarrels between both sections at that time. At the end of 1945 the FFPJP had about 10.000 members. These days the FFPJP counts more than 450.000 members and worldwide there are more than 600.000 licensed pétanque players. Pétanque is by far the most practised game of bowls on earth, undoubtedly because of the simplicity of its rules.



*Measuring (Jac Verheul)*

The name pétanque is a derivation of the provençal word ped tanco and it means the feet together on the ground. In contradiction to the game of jeu provençal the player, while playing, should keep his feet together and on the ground. The boules can be delivered either from an erect position, a bending or a squatting position. By the way, pétanque is the only game of bowls that is practised in a squatting position!

*The pointer: Emile Lovino from Marseille (Jac Verheul)*



The playing distance between the circle and the jack is between 6 and 10 m. The size of the metallic boules must be between 7,05 and 8 cm, the weight between 650 and 800 grams. The wooden jack (but in French) has a diameter between 25 and 35 mm.



*The shooter: Michel Schatz (or Passo) from Nîmes (Jac Verheul)*

For pétanque and jeu provençal there are competitions for singles, doubles and triples. In singles each player has three boules, in doubles and triples two boules. It is typical for all French games of boules that a player only throws his boule when the opponent's boule is closer to the jack or but. All

boules of one team nearer to the jack than any boule of the opponents counts one point each. Usually all games are up to 13 points.



*Pétanque tournament in St-Paul-lez-Durance (Fr)(Jac Verheul)*

### **Jeu provençal**



*The shooter: André Massoni from Marseille (Jac Verheul)*

The game of jeu provençal is the spiritual father of pétanque and it is the southern counterpart of the game boule lyonnaise (see further on). The game was created at the end of the 19th century and till now there are still a lot of participants, although the game has been largely overtaken by pétanque. The playing distance between the circle and the jack is between 15 and 20 m. While shooting, the shooter has to make three steps and the pointer has to leave the circle and balance on one foot while pointing. In order to hit in a regular way, the shooter has to hit at a maximum distance of 1 m before the object.

The size and the weight of the boules and the jack are the same as in pétanque. Jeu provençal and pétanque form part of the same French federation. Jeu provençal is especially practised in the southern part of France.

## Two hand-written documents by Aimé Coussin, Paris 19th century

Aimé Coussin was a former bookseller who lived in Paris at the end of the 19th century. He was a passionate boules player for more than twenty years. But he was very annoyed when he played at other places than the place of his own club, because the others players played in a different way he was used to. Each time, he wrote in his document, he had to learn the game completely from scratch again. That is why he decided to write some rules, in order that all players, wherever they would play, should play the game of boules in the same way.



There are two documents. The first one has the size of a notebook and consists of 24 pages and the dimensions are 13,5 to 21 cm. The second document consists of 20 pages and the dimensions are 17,5 to 21 cm. This document seems to be a more elaborated version of the first one. It comprises also some domestic rules.

The French language of the two documents is rather bad. There are a lot of clerical errors, spelling-mistakes and grammatical errors. Most of them are improved as much as possible in the transcribed text.

The first document is signed by a friend of Aimé Coussin, Dubois, who gave his approval to the proposed regulations with the text 'Parfait', it's perfect!

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These rules have been transcribed from the handwritten originals of Aimé Coussin by. The translation was fairly straightforward, with only a couple of passages where the meaning is less than clear. This was not so much a function of the language, but rather of style.

To some degree this comes through in the translation - imagine the differences there would be between a modern English document and a Victorian English one. As I suppose every translator does, a balance between fidelity to the original and workable English was attempted.

The game discussed is almost certainly being played with large wooden boules, at a distance comparable to Boule Lyonnaise or Bocce of today. It is possible these rules refer to Boules de Berge (a.k.a. Boule Parisienne), a game which has all but vanished in the face of Pétanque. For all the minor changes between their game of boules, and our pétanque, I think you'll enjoy seeing that some things never change.

Old rules

### Rules of the Game of Boules (1)

The game of boules is one which is daily catching on with more and more enthusiasts in Paris and the outskirts of the capital, and even in the country districts. The game of boules is an attractive gymnastic exercise, an amusement of skill and spirit. To conduct the game well, so as not to be caught by surprise, so as to prevent large adverse rounds, that's the spirit of the player who plays the game.

The game of boules is played with three boules or two according to the habits of the players. the jack is called the "cochonnet" (little piggy). The game is played to 11 points, the first one there wins the game. You can play with 2, 4, 6 or 8 players, that's up to the participants. But the best games are with 4 or 6 players, each with 3 boules. Like those good games with two boules when there are 6 or 8 players. But, I say, if there are 8 players in a game and each plays 3 boules that makes 24 boules, the last to play won't enjoy it, and won't play often enough to stay interested, and in winter it won't keep them warm.

There is at the same time a bad habit, that's become the rule, of taking four steps to play. Other clubs take two steps and still others just keep going. All of this is only habit, and all these habits make up the laws of each club. It makes you laugh when you see a pointer take four big steps and throw a short jack. Pointing with big strides like that he'll pass the jack. Making four big steps, has a ridiculous air about it and makes the youngsters laugh, and they, instead of developing a good attitude, laugh and criticize the bad players and end by saying "now there's a man who's got me beat with regard to striding". And they're right, it's too ridiculous.

The game of boules is more serious than you'd think, and there should be regulations for the self-respect of good players. I would propose, according to my belief, making one step to give the force for shooting, or pushing (la refente) and pointing. That will give more gracefulness to the players. What I call a step or movement in playing is the same thing. It will be less the subject of criticism than making four big steps running at the boule or jack, or not making any movement to play. Everyone will get accustomed to it and in the future our young enthusiasts won't have anything more to say. All these observations that I'm making to you don't enter into the regulations that I propose. It's an efficiency and an improvement which sooner or later is coming for the sake of players.

If for example a player leaves his club to join another, he has to do a new apprenticeship to pick up the customs of each club, it's very disagreeable. I thought that a little set of rules for boules would be useful, and please those gentlemen, the enthusiasts and players of boules, to not have to always argue about this or that situation which arises daily, and that each resolves in his own manner according to his own interest, and which are so often badly decided by stubborn people who don't know the game, who are often the most obstinate when judging situations out of sheer pride - saying I'm right!

Old rules

### First manuscript, Rules of the Game of Boules

#### Article 1

The game is normally played until the first team to make 11 points, wins. The game may be extended according to the pleasure of the players. They must all consent to prolong the match. One lone player may prevent an extension, he shall be within his rights. He will say to you "I'm playing to 11 points, I don't want to prolong it".

#### Article 2

As soon as the "little one" (jack) is thrown, it must be marked. He who threw the jack must point first. If he plays only one boule, he has that right. All the players must take their place by the jack which has been marked, this is a requirement.



#### Article 3

The pointer having thrown the jack far or near according to his pleasure, the opposing team have no say in the matter. The same when their turn comes, far or near, the player is at liberty.

#### Article 4

The pointer throwing the jack, if it's stopped by the audience, it's still good. If it's one of his teammates and the opposing team approves, then it stays where it is, unless it's hidden from view. Then he has the right to re-throw the jack where he wishes. If the pointer, having thrown the jack, if it's hidden, after 3 times, the other pointer from the opposing team takes the jack. If it's stopped by the opposing team, he has the right to re-throw the jack, the jack must stay where it is, if it can be seen from the marked goal, unless all the players agree to re-throw it. One lone player can oppose this, he's within his rights.

#### Article 5

The pointer playing, if his boule is stopped by the audience or one of his teammates, too bad for him the boule is good, but if it's one of the other team that stops the boule, the pointer has the right to put his boule wheresoever he likes or replay the boule. Because sometimes a bad sport on seeing a boule go in a good direction will stop it and make some false excuse. In all games, all those who would be fooled, are victims. It's taken into account in all the rules, to avoid any arguments.

#### Article 6

When a shooter (tireur) is about to shoot a boule or the jack, or playing to push, he must before shooting shout "watch out", it's in the rules, required as a general rule. If the jack is stopped by the audience, it must stay where it is. If the jack is stopped by a player from the shooter's team, it can't stay where it is because it could end up with boules from the shooter's team. There will necessarily be arguments. The opponents of the shooter have the right to leave the jack where it is, or to replace it where it was before the shot was made. The shooter may not replay his boule, but if it's a player from the opposing team who stopped the jack, the shooter has the right to toss the jack at one, two, three meters as he desires, from the place where he shot the jack, to the right or left or straight at his whim. Because there may be boules at a certain distance, he has the choice but it isn't the same for a boule shot that the audience stops, it stays, if the opposing team stops it, it's removed. This is aimed at underhanded players who by standing in front stop the jack, too bad for he who misses, it's he who is the victim.

#### Article 7

To know who has the point, the last to play or one of his partners, believing that he has the point, must measure first. If he moves the jack or the boule, he loses the advantage of measuring and leaves it to the opponent to measure. If he in turn moves the jack or the boule, he loses his advantage. If the point can't be decided

among the players, they must present it to be judged by the majority of the audience. If it still can't be said who (holds the point) the player who last played must play again, and then the opponent. This continues as long as the players leave it unchanged, if it stays until all the boules are gone, the end is null, and he who threw out the jack starts again.

#### Article 8

All boules thrown are (considered) played even when holding the point. It's up to the player to pay attention to the game and if his partner stops the boule believing he may replay it, he's mistaken. It's a lost boule. If it's a player from the opposing team who stops the boule, the pointer for his trouble, has the right to place his ball where it suits him.

#### Article 9

One must not play before his turn, under penalty of leaving the boule badly played, unless the other team tricked you by saying that they had the point, in that case it may be replayed.

#### Article 10

He who forgets to play his boule, when all his team have finished and the opponents have begun to play out their remaining boules to empty their hands, he no longer has the right to play. He would have all the advantage if they were to have shot the jack or somesuch.

#### Article 11

The inadvertently removed boule which might have counted a point, no longer counts. By the same token if the jack is taken up one cannot count what may have been forgotten. If a boule which has been played is disturbed where it lies, from whatever direction, it shall be put back where it had stopped. If that place cannot be demonstrated, the boule is removed.

#### Article 12

When players are asked how many boules they have left to play, they must respond correctly under penalty of losing the end. He who abandons the game, by right, loses it.

#### Article 13

If a player needs or pretends he needs to let his boules be played by one of his partners, the opposing team may designate the player who will play the boules. Since there are some players who do better than others, and since the teams were chosen for a well matched game, the opponents are within their rights.

#### Article 14

The jack lost or a boule lost, depends on the disposition of the court being played and the habit of the players. The jack gone out, the pointer who threw it starts again. If in the course of the game the players can't remember the score, they must take the question it to the audience. Just as when the jack is stopped, it's the majority of the audience who judge the facts.

#### Article 15

When a boule is rolling, it must be accorded respect, one mustn't stop it nor throw or remove trash. If while your partner is preparing to play you notice something which may interfere with his play, you may do it, but only before he plays. If it's the other team you have no right.

Old rules

## Second manuscript, The rules of the game of boules

### Article 1

The game is normally played until the first team to make 11 points, wins. The game may be extended according to the pleasure of the players. They must all consent to prolong the match. One lone player may oppose this, he shall be within his rights.

### Article 2

As soon as the "little one" (jack) is thrown, it must be marked. He who threw the jack must point first. If he plays only one boule, he has the right. All the players must take their place by the jack, this is a requirement. The pointer having thrown the jack far or near according to his pleasure, the opposing team have no say in the matter. The same when their turn comes, far or near, the player is at liberty.



### Article 3

The pointer on throwing the jack, finding it stopped by the audience, it's still good. If it's one of the his teammates and the opposing team approves, then it stays where it is, unless it's hidden. The pointer on throwing the jack, finds it stopped by the opposing team, he has the right to rethrow it.

### Article 4

The pointer playing, if his boule is stopped by the audience or one of his teammates, too bad for him the boule is good, but if it's one of the other team that stops the boule, the pointer has the right to put his boule wheresoever he likes or replay the boule. Because sometimes a bad sport on seeing a boule go in a good direction will stop it and make some false excuse. In all games, all those who would be fooled, are victims. It's taken into account in all the rules, to avoid any arguments.

### Article 5

When a shooter (tireur) is about to shoot a boule or the jack, or playing to push, he must before shooting shout "watch out" to warn the public, it's in the rules, required as a general rule.

### Article 6

If the jack is stopped by the audience, it must stay where it is. If the jack is stopped by a player from the shooter's team, it can't stay where it is because it could end up with boules from the shooter's team. There will necessarily be arguments. The opponents of the shooter have the right to leave the jack where it is, or to replace it where it was before the shot was made. The shooter may not replay his boule, but if it's a player from the opposing team who stopped the jack, the shooter has the right to toss the jack at one, two, three meters as he desires, from the place where he shot the jack, to the right or left or straight at his whim. Because there may be boules at a certain distance, he has the choice but it isn't the same for a boule shot that the audience stops, it stays. All boules shot and stopped by players are removed.

This rule is aimed at underhanded players who by standing in front stop boules or the jack, too bad for he who misses, it's he who is the victim.

### Article 7

To know who has the point, the last to play or one of his partners, believing that he has the point, must measure first. If he moves the jack or the boule, he loses the advantage of measuring and leaves it to the opponent to do the same. If it can't be decided who has the point, it must be presented to be judged by the majority of the audience. If it still can't be said who (holds the point) the player who last played must play again, and then the opponent. This continues as long as the players leave it

unchanged, if it stays until all the boules are gone, the end is null, and he who threw out the jack starts again.

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If a boule which has been played is disturbed where it lies, from whatever direction, it shall be put back where it had stopped. If that place cannot be demonstrated, the boule is removed.

#### Article 13

When players are asked how many boules they have left to play, they must respond honestly. He who abandons the game, by right, loses it.

#### Article 14

If a player must leave for some reason, the opposing team may designate the player who will play the boules. Since there are some players who do better than others, and since the teams were chosen for a well matched game, the opponents are within their rights.

#### Article 15

The jack lost or a boule lost, depends on the disposition of the court being played and the habit of the players. The jack gone out, the pointer who threw it starts again. If in the course of the game the players can't remember the score, they must take the question it to the audience. Just as when the jack is stopped, it's the majority of the audience who judge the facts.

#### Article 16

When a boule is rolling, it must be accorded respect, one mustn't stop it nor throw or remove trash. If while your partner is preparing to play you notice something which may interfere with his play, you may do it, but only before he plays. If it's the other team you have no right.

#### Article 17

Gentlemen, several players have complained of the abuses of latecomers to the games, not the latecomers themselves, but the choosing of them. Players who've lost a game or two call out for reinforcements. That's not a reason for choosing a player, the match must remain balanced until the end of the day. The fellows may object to this choosing of a player, telling you let's carry on the game the way we started. That to me is the most fair, because it's too easy to lose the first game so as to win the right to choose a player. It happens very often that a first game is won by luck and the second comes point by point. It's not that one team was so strong, it's a match that well deserves a rematch.

#### Article 18

As for the money on the game and for the day, those who lose two games more than their opponents shall pay the boule-keeper. This is accepted by the vast majority

of players, neither more nor less than what is owed the boule-keeper, so as not to attract gamblers to the game.

**Article 19**

For the same reason, bets are forbidden. Those responsible, the bettors, will not be tolerated.

**Article 20**

For the pride and honour of the boules club, there must reign there a moral union of equality and sincerity for the game. No quarrels nor foul language, they only ruin all civility. It's not only that we are in the public eye and that it would be indecent to utter oaths, for the sake of the club and the strangers around us we won't put up with it. In the name of progress I propose the following punishments. The first time, he shall be reprimanded by the players. The second time, three days on his feet, that's to say three days without playing. The third time, eight days without playing, and the fourth and last time, the players will spurn him as incorrigible, leaving him at complete liberty to play by himself so as to no longer bother anyone. This little rule was made for that ill-meaning person, badly behaved and jealous of our union and our freedom. He looks to insinuate himself in the club so as to spread disunion among the players. A remedy must be brought to this intrigue, that's to expel them from the club. Without being perfect, nonetheless we must have standards, society requires this even from us.