



UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE (U3A)

SETTING UP A PETANQUE GROUP

My research into U3a Pétanque groups has revealed a disparate approach to the sport which mirrors, to an extent, the wide variety in the games of boules that exist in France, Pétanque being just one but the most played.

In setting up a group, you need to establish to what level your members will wish to play, the choice of extremes being Pétanque played to the official international rules, probably played at least once a week to achieve a good standard of proficiency, or a weekly game of social 'boules' played to your own rules. The disadvantage of inventing your own version is that there will inevitably have to be some rule setting and it seems a bit curious to have to invent rules where a set of rules exist that have evolved over 100 years.

In addition, playing to the standard rules provides a platform for playing in a league or against other U3A Pétanque groups. It all comes down to how serious and competitive you wish to be. I became the Leader of Malmesbury and District U3A Pétanque Group in 2014 and we agreed from the outset that we would incorporate the U3A themes of 'Life-Long Learning' and now "Laugh, Learn and Live" and we therefore incorporate some aspects of skills and tactics instruction into nearly all our weekly meetings. We are fortunate that the North Wiltshire area is very strong in Pétanque, U3A and otherwise, and we have been able to help our players, who wish, to rapidly gain some experience in competitive but friendly play.

Where to play? With local social boules, this is not difficult as you can choose any surface, anywhere. However, if you wish to play Pétanque, you will need a hard surface which conforms to certain dimensional requirements. Much information can be obtained from the website of the Pétanque England www.englishpetanque.org.uk. Fortunately, a number of pubs and a growing number of sports centres have built Pétanque terrains. If you don't have access to a purpose-built terrain, you could start on any open area such as a car park, a Gravel driveway or even a footpath or redundant running track. It is well worth visiting existing U3A Pétanque Groups to see how they operate and whether that would suit what you are trying to achieve.

What equipment is needed for Pétanque? Each player will need up to 3 boules, which fall into two categories: Leisure Boules and Competition Boules. Leisure Boules can usually be bought on-line through suppliers such as Amazon or through local sports shops and also through mainstream boules suppliers. Competition Boules are precision-made to specific weights, sizes and markings and are inevitably more expensive than Leisure Boules which are not made to a consistent specification. However, I would suggest that players commence with Leisure Boules until they are certain that they wish to invest in Competition Boules. In buying the latter, most players prefer to hold a boule before buying a set to see if it is the right size and weight and has the right 'feel'.

Other than boules, you will need a supply of jacks or cochonnets, some tape measures and that's about it. You can buy scorers to keep track of a game and some players may need to use a magnetic boule lifter which can be obtained from the above suppliers or you can use a magnetic tool lifter obtainable from DIY stores.

It is very important to maintain a friendly sociable environment so that, win or lose, everyone feels that they have enjoyed themselves. If you come across those who object having to conform to the rules, because they say they are only there to have fun, it is worth explaining that the rules are there to ensure that **everyone** has fun. There may be rules that you wish to amend or choose not to apply but it is important to know why you are doing so. If your players do not know the rules, they could be exposed to gamesmanship or put to a disadvantage in any matches.

For players wishing to develop their skills, I refer you to my notes on Playing Pétanque, or you may wish to ask me to arrange some coaching which may be arranged through the Pétanque England Coaching services.

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