

Get a Grip

If you learn to play golf or tennis, one of the most important things you will learn is the correct grip. But how many pétanque players simply pick up a set of boules and "pick it up as they go along"? The result can so easily be bad habits that become ingrained and are hard to overcome.

The most common fault is a "claw grip", where the fingers and thumb grip the boule.



The correct way to hold a boule is to start with your fingers together, very slightly curled and the boule resting in the dip.

Now curl the boule into the palm of your hand, keeping your fingers together. NB the thumb is *not* used to grip the boule. It should either be kept away from the boule or just resting on it but without gripping it.



Why? You need to ensure that the thumb does not deflect the boule as you throw it.



Turn your hand over, the boule should feel comfortable in your hand.

You should be holding approximately half the boule. This assumes you have the correct size boule for your hand. Too small, and it may be harder to grip correctly and control. Too big and you may have to grip it too tightly or the boule may slip out of your hand.

Basically, the boule is just *resting* in your hand, rather than being held in a grip with the fingers and thumb. When you throw the boule, the wrist is bent, as shown.



As you release the boule, the wrist straightens and the boule "rolls out" from the fingers. You should follow-through with the fingers straight and kept together.

This action automatically puts backspin on the boule, which helps you to better control the shots. By keeping the fingers together and straight throughout the throwing action, including the follow-through, you should ensure that the boule is spinning straight which will give you a much better chance of the boule going in a straight line when it hits the terrain.

A common fault is to turn the hand as you play, releasing the boule from the side of the hand, rather than in a straight line, as shown.

This will spin the boule and make it turn to the left when it hits the terrain, rather than go in a straight line. NB This is the case for right-handed players, the opposite will be true for left-handed players.

Sometimes you may want to spin the boule, either to the right or left but most of the time, you will want to play a natural, straight shot, without side-spin. When you throw the boule, watch how it spins. If thrown correctly, it will be spinning straight. It's easier to see how the boule spins if it has stripes. It's also much easier to work with a partner who can check how you are holding and releasing the boule.



Also, watch how the boule bounces when it lands on the terrain. If it goes sideways when you want it to go straight, check the spin on the boule, especially if you find that *every* shot goes sideways.

Of course, a slope on the terrain or stones can also affect the bounce. These are other factors that need to be kept in mind.

Does it really matter how you hold the boule? We probably all know players who play with a "claw grip" but nevertheless manage to point quite well, thank you. There's nothing in the rules to say how you should hold a boule. If you wish, you're free to roll it palm up, as in lawn bowls.

But if you watch the top players, the French and World Champions – often the same players! - nobody plays like this. There must be a reason. If you do play 'palm-up' or grip the boule with the fingers and thumb, you can't really put any backspin on the boule. This may not matter much on a smoother, harder terrain where you play a rolling shot but if you play on a more stony terrain – or there are blocking boules – it may be better to play a higher lob and minimise the distance the boule rolls. Here you really need backspin to give you more control.

The same also applies when shooting. If you watch all the top players, they all put backspin on the boule, which basically increases the chances of getting a *carreau* when you hit the target boule.

Courtesy of Ray Ager
Brighton & Hove Pétanque Club