

Playing Better (?) Teams

If you're playing in competitions – or even just 'friendlies' – you may find yourselves against a 'better' team. So, how should you play?

The first thing is, don't start with a negative attitude—the sorts of thing you often hear:

- "They're much better, we don't stand a chance"
- "Oh no, not them again, they always win"
- "Come on, let's get it over with"
- etc

With that sort of attitude, you've lost before you start. You should **always** approach every game with a positive, mental attitude.

- Every team is beatable
- Even the 'best' teams can be off-form

You should always try your best and be 'up' for the game. Believe in your own abilities and make sure that you make the effort to play to the best of your ability and hopefully win!

Playing Strong Shooters

Let's say you have a couple of good pointers in your team and an 'average' shooter.

You're against a team with a couple of good shooters and a pointer. How will you play?

Firstly, if they really have the upper hand in terms of shooting, there are a few things you can do to make it more difficult for them to shoot:

- Try not to just play 'open' shots that are easy for shooters to hit.
- Playing close to the opponent's boule makes any shot more difficult.
- Playing onto an opponent's boule, *devant de boule*, makes a shot very difficult, often requiring two good shots to gain any advantage.
- Playing in-line with an opponent's boule will increase the chance of them taking their own boule out. They will often have to shoot on the side—a *much* more difficult shot—to avoid this.
- One of the most difficult shots is over another boule, so if you can get behind the opponent's boule, it will be a hard shot for them.
- If you can play right on to the jack, this can sometimes be to your advantage. The jack may move, hopefully with your boule, perhaps giving you more space to play. The jack may go out of play, leaving a dead-end.
- You may occasionally want to play a boule that's quite long. It may not necessarily win the point but it can make a shot that much more difficult.

You also need to assess the relative strengths of your pointers against their shooters.

Let's start by supposing you win every point. They have now got to hit 100% of their shots to beat you—not even the World Champions manage that! However, to be more realistic, neither do they win 100% of the points.

Supposing you win 75% of the points. Now they've got to hit at least 75% to beat you—it still needs a good, on form shooter to achieve this. If you only win, say, 50% of the points, now they only have to hit 50% of shots.

One other important thing is that, generally, it's harder to shoot accurately at longer distances. So, if you find that the opponent's always try and play a short game—easy for the shooters—the first thing you should be thinking about is playing a long game, assuming you get the jack.

Secondly, it's important not to get despondent, if they shoot your good points. If you ask, "What's the purpose of pointing?" the beginner is most likely to reply, "To get near the jack." The expert is more likely to say, "To make the opponents shoot, leaving us with the balance of boules to win the end."

Finally, you should always try and choose the terrain that favours your strengths and their weaknesses. So, you want a terrain that favours pointing, usually a smoother, easier terrain, if possible.

Playing Good Pointers

Now consider the case where the opponents have, say, two or three good pointers but only a weak shooter. Firstly, you need to assess your relative strengths. If you have a good shooting team, consider shooting all their good points. It can demoralise them and if you're not going to out-point them, you're going to have to shoot.

If you are more of a pointing team, then the question is, are you better (or worse) pointers than them? If better, then you should be able to win by out-pointing them. If worse, then you have to try and make it as difficult as possible for them to point.

It's now more important than ever to try and get boules in front of the jack, rather than behind or to the side. Boules in front are blocking boules which can either impede the opponents or be promoted—either by them or by you. Boules behind the jack are a target for good pointers to rest on, making any shot more difficult.

Choose the terrain. If you have the upper-hand in terms of pointing, then you want to choose a terrain that favours your strengths. If you are good at higher lobs, whereas the opponent's are 'rollers', then a more difficult, stony terrain should favour you. Again, also consider the distance. Like shooting, pointing is usually more difficult at longer distances. If you are more accurate than them, play a longer game, if they are more accurate, then a shorter game should make it easier for you.

If all else fails...

Of course, it happens that you are simply against a better team who are going to beat you. Again, try to play to the best of your ability and take as many points as possible. If you lose, say, 13-7, those 7 points may make the difference in final placings. "Look and Learn". If they are better players, observe how they play, their technique, stance, choice of shots, tactics, etc. Try and learn—then go away and practise!

Always try to take away something positive from every game. Even if you lost, what was your best shot? How many points did you score? Did you make the right tactical decisions, etc. Have confidence in your abilities and build on these.

Practice games

1. Playing Strong Shooters

Either choose a team of good shooters to play or, for practice, agree that one team will try and shoot as much as possible, rather than pointing.

Choose a terrain that favours your pointing strengths.

Practise the techniques outlined above to make shooting more difficult.

Try and play at different distances to determine what gives you the best advantage.

2. Playing Good Pointers

Either choose a team of good pointers to play or, for practise, agree that one team will try and point as many boules as possible, rather than shooting.

Choose a terrain that favours your strengths.

Try different tactics:

- Can you beat them by shooting?
- Can you beat them by pointing?

Try really hard to play boules in front of the jack.

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