

Benefits of Pétanque

Although pétanque is not an aerobic sport, it does demand a high degree of physical stamina to play throughout an entire day, a requirement of many tournaments and competitions. Equally it does not require speed or athleticism but precision and consistent rhythm to achieve good results.

For these reasons, it allows players who may not feel able to compete in more physically explosive sports to experience the enjoyment of taking part in a genuinely competitive environment, often for the first time in their lives.

If players are not physically capable of racing around a football field or a tennis court, they often 'switch off' sport at a very early age and never return. Pétanque gives them the opportunity to compete on level teams because the emphasis is on skill and accuracy, rather than power or reaction time. It requires judgement of distance and line and the ability to vary your technique and delivery depending on what type of surface or slope is being used, in many ways having more in common with golf than most other sports.

The sport was developed from Jeu Provençal a game which required players to run several steps before releasing a boule in shooting style or to balance on one leg whilst trying to get close to the target jack. An experienced player, so affected by arthritis that he could no longer play devised a version in which you had to stand in a circle whilst delivering your boules and so the sport was born at La Cioatut in France in 1907. Thus, one of its merits is that it was devised for, and can be played by, people with any of a number of disabilities which would otherwise debar them from competition. The rules actually incorporate clauses for those who need to play from a wheelchair or who suffer the loss of a lower limb. Asthmatics, amputees and even those with cerebral palsy can enjoy a social, yet competitive involvement.

It is also one of the few sports in which men and women, boys, and girls, the retired and their grandchildren can compete on equal teams, either in discrete competitions or altogether. It is promoted as a family sport. Particularly with youngsters, it helps to develop the ability to concentrate for long periods, a quality less obviously employed in today's culture of instant gratification and rapid technological response.

In England, it is played with one exception in an outdoor setting so, at the very least, it gets people outside breathing fresh air away from the computer environment in which they may be obliged to work and live. It is also a very social sport which encourages and enables interaction with others.

To succeed in pétanque, as in any other sport, the self-discipline of practising technique to produce accuracy and consistency is important.

Another benefit is that it puts teamwork, strategy, and tactical awareness at a high premium. Decisions have to be made constantly about which team member should play next (as there is no predetermined sequence of play as in, for example, bowls), what shot should be attempted., when to defend and when to attack, etc.

Players have to learn to observe the relative strengths and weaknesses of their own and the opposing team and to create strategies which give them best opportunity of winning the game. Many of these skills have their application in the decision-making which may be needed in careers later in life.

The heightened importance of the of psychology in modern sport, in particular the process of finding out about your own capabilities and limitations in terms of mental strength, is just as prominent in pétanque as any other competitive situation.

World Championships are won as much in the mind as with the body and, occasionally, as team with lesser skills can beat one deemed to be generally stronger because of their better preparation, concentration, and mental strength – and maybe the odd bit of luck!