

BEGINNER'S BOCCELISM (AKA BOCCELISM A GO-GO)

You've seen the pros on TV. You've watched the buckets crash in person from the bleachers of your local tossing grounds. Now you want to play yourself, but you're intimidated: no uniforms, no scoreboards, no professional judge sitting on high sternly making pronouncements over the loudspeakers. And then there's the weighty Code Of Laws you've thumbed through in the bookstore, looking and reading more like a product of the American Bar Association than the American Boccelism Association. What's a novice to do? Fret no more! What follows is the most abbreviated version of the rules of boccelism to be found in print anywhere. These instructions may not prepare you to sit on the commission of the NIT, but you'll be ready to smash some buckets and annoy every Wilkerson in your neighborhood. Case On!

WHAT DO I NEED?

Balls and buckets. Lots of buckets. Make do with a decent bocce set from a nearby sporting goods or department store for the balls, but stay away from those cheap, brightly colored, plastic coated balls; they won't last a weekend. Then poke around a hardware store and pick up two metal 5 quart paint buckets (Leaktite No. 5) and two 10 quart mop buckets (Behrens is recommended). While you're there, picking up a little spray paint or carpenter's chalk wouldn't hurt.

WHERE DO I PLAY?

Find a yard or some park space at least 50 feet across. Set up the buckets 12 paces apart and use some of that paint or chalk to mark the spots so you'll know where to return the buckets after they've been blasted away. The small bucket should lay sideways on the ground facing the opposite buckets; the large bucket sits upright just behind the small one. Drop the pallina (the small white ball that came with the bocce set) in the middle of the field, equidistant from both sets of buckets.

HOW DO I PLAY?

Both players toss at the same time towards the pallina; the player who's ball is closest without hitting the pallina goes first. Players should always toss from behind the leading edge of the small bucket. You can mark a line if you've got any shifty characters in your posse. The players then alternate tosses at each other's buckets. After four exchanges (thus swapping balls), the tossing order switches, and so on for the rest of the match. Eight sets of four exchanges is the standard, but you can play as few or as many as you want; whatever you decide, the players should switch sides of the field at the halfway mark.

HOW DO I KEEP SCORE?

Sure, you'll need to learn to use those fancy scoresheets when you join your nearest ABA chapter, but for now any scratch paper will do, or a dry erase board, just enough to make tally marks for each player and keep track of where you are in the match. Every time a player hits a bucket they get a point, plus winning an exchange is worth an extra point. A player wins an exchange by getting a hit when the opponent misses, or if both players hit, whoever had the better hit wins the exchange. Who decides the "better" hit? Either get someone to volunteer to be an informal judge, or go old school and get a group decision from your assembled friends – you do have friends, right? You can choose to let the judge or the gallery award an extra point for something spectacular or unusual. Be daring. Be imaginative. Make up your own special rules. This is boccelism, dammit!

WHAT ABOUT ALL THAT OTHER STUFF?

Bonus points, bocs, ganeshas, all the things you don't quite follow when you're sitting in the stands sipping beer – forget about it! You're just getting started; get the rhythm of the game under your belt first, you've got the dreary days of next winter to crack open that copy of the Code you got for Valentine's Day but haven't touched; for now, make noise while the sun shines. Oh, whichever player scores the most points wins.