

How long is a piece of



At some stage in a petanque player's career they don't know which boule is nearest the jack. Occasionally someone places their size 9s in the gap between boule and coche and then guesses the size of the rest of the gap. Another alternative is to use the piece-of-string-with-a-plastic-thingy-on-the-end as supplied by low quality boules retailers but as they progress up the petanque ladder they realise that it's time to spend 99p on a steel tape measure. The rules are nice and clear here as they have a whole section to themselves. Here are the key points. This is for games where there is no umpire which is 99% of all the games you are likely to play.

POINTS AND MEASURING

Article 25 Temporary removal of boules

In order to measure a point, it is permitted, after having marked their positions, to temporarily remove the boules and obstacles situated between the jack and the boules to be measured. After measuring, the boules and the obstacles which were removed are put back in place. If the objects cannot be removed, the measuring is done with the aid of calipers.

Article 26 Measuring of points

The measuring of a point is the responsibility of the player who last played or by one of their team-mates. The opponents always have the right to measure after one of these players. Measuring must be done with appropriate instruments, which each team must possess. Notably, it is forbidden to effect measurements with the feet.

Article 28 Displacement of the boules or the jack

The team, whose player displaces the jack or one of the contested boules, while effecting a measurement, loses the point.

Article 29 Foreign bodies adhering to the boules or jack.

Any foreign bodies adhering to the boules or the jack must be removed before measuring a point.

So what is there to argue over. Let's start with Article 26. First sentence says who should measure. No problem except some teams are reluctant to do so as they may have trouble getting up (getting down is easy) as their joints are not quite what they used to be. So the other team does the job. As long as both teams are happy with the measuring it's all over. A guidance note for umpires found on the web says the following.

"Always accept with good grace if the other team want to measure after you have finished and declared what you think - the Rules specifically allow this. Out of politeness, it's not a bad idea to offer this to the other side if the measure is close.

If you can't agree with the other team after you have both measured call an Umpire or a "neutral" if an umpire is not available. Once you have called in a neutral "arbitrator" don't crowd him or stand peering closely at what he is doing. Walk away from the measure and

don't come back until the "arbitrator" has announced his decision (which you must accept without question). This is partly out of politeness and partly in acknowledgment that you and the other team have failed to agree the outcome, but in doing so have agreed to accept a neutral decision.

In all circumstances, if you cannot genuinely make a decision about which boule is closer by whatever method of measurement you use, declare the boules in contention to be equal in your opinion."

Richard Powell, SCPA Regional Umpire

How do you do it? With your 99p steel tape measure you hold the zero up against the boule with your left hand and hold the tape above the coche with your right hand using fingers to prop it above the coche so you won't touch it.



Measure from the equator of the boule to the edge of the coche and shout out the figure. Repeat with other boule. Indicate which boule is nearer by pointing to it.



Why don't you measure to the centre of the coche? Because you can't tell where it is. The edge where fresh air meets coloured wood is easy to see. Estimating where the middle of the jack is may mean an error of a few millimeters which will make all the difference in a tight measure.

You should be able to look directly down on the edge of the coche to decide the distance. If you're stretching and you're not in that position you'll give a false reading. You may need another person to attend to the boule end of the tape while you concentrate on the coche end.

What happens if I touch or move a boule or coche? Touching is OK. Moving is bad. Article 28 tries to explain it. The team who 'displaces the jack or one of the contested boules' loses the point. But what does loses the point mean? Is it the point being measured? Does it mean that the team who does this must play again whether they are nearest or not? Opinion differs.

Even between top players and Umpires there is no definitive answer. Common sense says anyone who moves a boule or coche while measuring should lose the point but what's the point. I favour lose the point means play next boule until something changes. Others say lose the point being measured which leaves us to decide who plays next. Sporting behaviour says if you mess up measuring you apologise and play the next boule.

This is one reason apart from dodgy joints why some older players don't like measuring. The fear of moving something. If you're young and fit and steady on your knees it's a "good thing" to volunteer to measure as it ingratiates you with your opponents but also gives you a small air of authority and piste presence and every little helps.

Another wrinkle is that there's more than one reason for measuring. The simple reason is to see who's won the end or to see which boule out of two is nearer but there's also the time when measuring is done for tactical reasons - to see who lies 3rd or 4th and informing the next player about what shot to play. This seems to fall outside the 60 seconds allowed to play a boule so when tactical measuring is taking place the clock still ticks.

More advice from an Umpire.

"ALWAYS measure from boule (end of tape) to coche, not the other way round. Position yourself with your head over the coche, looking vertically down on it. If the light is mainly from one side (e.g. under floodlights), position yourself on the other side (if possible) in order not to cause shadows – and ask other people (politely!) to move if their shadow interferes with the measure.

If you can't comfortably extend your arm far enough to reach the boule you are measuring, ask someone else to hold the end of the tape. At this stage, keep the tape cover and tape well clear of the coche and any other boules. CAREFULLY extend the tape until its end is touching the boule you are measuring. If you are using a proper pétanque tape, the "end" of the tape is the rectangular metal "hinge" NOT the piece of plastic with the pointed end that is attached to it. This is a device to indicate whether the tape is the right distance off the ground at this end. It is if the tip of the plastic pointer, hanging freely, is just touching the ground.

Once the tape is properly positioned against the nearest point on the boule to the coche, try to secure the position of the hand holding the tape by resting it on the ground, otherwise there is a significantly greater risk of moving the boule when you turn your attention to the "business" end of the measure, at the coche. Ensure that the tape is tight - if it sags, the distance shown on the tape will be too long. Hold the taut tape so that it passes directly over the coche and as close to the top of it as possible without touching or disturbing it - if the tape is too high above the coche, the distance shown is likely to be too long. Look vertically down to the edge of the coche nearest to the boule being measured - DO NOT guess as to where the centre of the coche is, because your guess will not be accurate, and NOT to the further edge of the coche a) because you are trying to find out which boule is closer to the closest point on the coche and b) because the coche may not be perfectly spherical, so its diameter from the near edge to the far edge may not be the same in all directions.

You MUST be looking vertically downwards - if your head is nearer the boule than the vertical position the perceived measure will be too short; further away and the measure will appear too long. "

Richard Powell, SCPA Regional Umpire

If you're in a league team it might be worth choosing your measurer before the game. Don't wait until a critical point in the game to find out you don't know the length of a piece of string.