

# Open Rules

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The United States Bocce Federation is a nonprofit, charitable corporation organized to promote the sport of Bocce through education and amateur competition and any funds received are used strictly for this objective. The USBF is the only internationally sanctioned governing body for Bocce in the United States. The USBF is also a member of the Federation International de Boules and the Confederazione Boccistica Internazionale.

## Who can play Bocce?

Everyone can play! There is no race, sex, or age discrimination in the sport of Bocce. It is played all over the world and is part of the International Special Olympics and the Senior Games.

## What do you need to play?

You need a set of 8 balls, four matching balls for each team, with different colors and a target ball called a “jack” or “pallino”. It is also helpful to have some type of measuring device. Tape measures are commonly used as well as antennae, expanding pens, string devices and laser measuring tools.

## How many people on a Team?

Games can be played one-on-one (singles), pairs (doubles), triples, or foursomes. In USBF format, singles are played with each person throwing 4 balls and alternating use of each end of the court. In doubles (pairs), each team member throws 2 balls and again alternate use of each end of the court. Triples have become the newest format and 12 balls are used instead of 8. Play is the same as Doubles with each team member throwing 2 balls and alternating use of each end of the court. Foursomes should be played with 2 members of a team stationed at opposite ends of the court and playing 2 balls each. Variations to the foursome style are used in some regions of the USA and certainly are permissible and at the discretion of Tournament directors or organizers.

## Court Dimensions:

Official courts are 86.92' in length and 13.12' in width. Unofficial courts can be smaller. Court surface has the greatest variation found in the USA. Some examples are carpet, crushed stone, dirt, oyster shells, clay, and most recently synthetic carpets and poured liquid creating a smooth, extremely fast surface.

## Ball Size:

The USBF standard for tournament play: 106-107 mm Diameter and 900-920 grams (approx 2 lbs) in Weight. Usually, Tournament Directors will announce if only “house balls” can be used. The USBF allows players to use their own set of 4 matching balls if the specifications are approved prior to the start of the games.

### **Foul Lines:**

- Should be clearly marked both on court surface and side boards
- There should only be one line for pointing and shooting and the recommendation is 13' from the back wall.

Players may step on but not have their foot completely over the foul line before releasing the pallino or the bocce ball.

### **Start the game!**

Begin the game with a flip of a coin between the captains of each team. The winner of the coin flip will determine the end from which play will start and also has control of the pallino. The losing team chooses the color of balls it wants to use (applies when "house" balls are used). Coin toss winner throws the pallino.

- Toss is valid when the pallino is placed between the center line and the far foul line without touching either line.
- If the player fails to place the pallino in valid area, the opposing team will put the pallino in play.
- If both players fail, the pallino returns to the original team for an additional attempt. Alternating process continues until pallino is in valid position.
- The Team that originally tossed the pallino will play the first ball.

### **The Game!**

- The first ball may be rolled by ANY member of the Team that originally threw the pallino. Winners of coin toss or previous frame
- Should the rolled ball hit the backboard without touching the pallino, it is a dead ball and removed from the court.
- The same Team must throw again and continue rolling until a valid point is established.
- Once the point is established, the opposing Team must point or shoot until they make a new (closer) point.
- Players may use side boards at any time.
- Balls can be measured at any time, and, in case of doubt, an official referee or Tournament official should be called. In the event a tie is determined, the last Team to roll a ball must roll again until the tie is broken.
- If after all balls are played there is still a tie, no points are awarded and play resumes with the Team last scoring tossing the pallino from the opposite end of the court.
- In the event a ball/balls are moved during a measurement by an official, the balls are returned to approximate positions and official will still make the call. If, however, a member of a Team currently playing measures and moves a ball, the point is awarded to the opposing team. In any case, the decision of a referee or official is final.
- One Team Member can cross the centerline to measure balls. Other players need to remain at their respective end of the court.

### **Backboard:**

- If a ball hits the backboard without first touching another ball or pallino, it is a dead ball and removed from the court. Referred to as “Dead Back Wall” violation.
- If a ball is shot, hits the backboard illegally and then strikes a stationary ball/s, the shot ball is removed from the court and the stationary ball/s are placed in their approximate original position/s
- The pallino is always a valid target and remains in play even if it strikes the back wall after being struck by any valid ball during a frame. If however, the pallino is knocked out of the court or bounces back in front of the center line, the frame is considered VOID and the Team that started the frame will begin again at the same end of the court.
- In the event ball/s resting against a backboard are moved as a result of a valid shot, they remain in their new position. If however they move as a result of an invalid shot, they are returned to their approximate original positions.

### **Scoring:**

- Only one team scores in a frame (unless there is a tie)
- Games are usually played to 12 points
- Final games are usually played to 15 points (USBF recommended)
- Tournament Directors can decide any variation to game points but should do so prior to the start of the event

### **Illegal movement of balls or the pallino:**

- Players should never touch or move any ball or the pallino until frame has ended. If a player moves a ball prior to the end of a frame (thinking play is over) and the balls cannot be accurately relocated to their positions, all remaining non-thrown balls of the nonoffending team are counted as points. If the offense is committed by the playing team, all non-thrown balls of that team are voided, and the frame is over.
- ALL players should be out of the court if possible. If not possible, they should be positioned in front of play area when a player at the opposite end is shooting.
- If a player is in the court standing BEHIND the point balls and pallino (In harm’s way or “downstream”) and is struck by a ball or pallino as a result of a raffa or volo shot, the opposing team receives the Rule of Advantage! The options are
  - Leave all balls and pallino in the new configuration, or
  - Remove the ball or pallino that struck their opponent from the court. If the pallino is removed from the court, the frame is VOID and the Team that started the frame will begin again at the same end of the court, or
  - They can place the ball or pallino that struck their opponent anywhere on the court.

If, however, the player is standing in front of the point balls or pallino (Out of Harm’s way or “upstream”) and is struck by a ball that moves backwards toward a player as the result of a raffa or volo shot, the ball remains in play because the player was in a valid position. In the event the pallino moves backward and touches a player the frame is VOID and the Team that started the frame will begin again at the same end of the court.

If a player is struck by a ball or pallino in a point attempt or lag, the Rule of Advantage applies no matter where the player was standing.

### **Shooting and Pointing:**

- There are basically two (2) types of shooting.
- Volo: the act of lofting the ball in the air attempting to hit the target. Tournament Directors may for safety concerns determine that Volo shooting may not be allowed. If it is allowed the USBF uses the same foul line for both raffa and volo shooting.
- Raffa: the act of shooting at a target either by releasing the ball at ground level, slightly lofting the ball or rolling the ball in a forceful manner.
- Pointing is done with either foot or both feet before or on the pointing line. A throw is valid as long as any part of the foot/feet is on the line.
- When shooting (either style) the player is allowed to step on the line prior to releasing the ball. As long as even the heel is on the line, it is a valid shot.
- Once a player has released the ball, he/she is allowed to continue steps up to the center line. This is considered valid.

### **Late arrivals, substitutions, delays, etc:**

- A team that is not present within 15 minutes of the scheduled start of the game will forfeit the game.
- In a tournament where substitutes are allowed, a Team may substitute only once during a game, and it must be announced to the opposing Team before the start of the next frame.
- A substituted player may not return to that game. If a player/s arrive late, the game will start with that Team playing shorthanded and minus the appropriate number of balls. Player may then enter game at “shorthanded” end after frame is completed. In the event a player must leave a game in progress, an alternate may enter at the end of a frame and the player that leaves cannot return for remainder of game. If no alternate is available, the game continues using the late arrival rule.
- Repeated “conferences” during a frame causing delays in the game are discouraged. If delays continue, the offended Team Captain should notify an official.
- If an official issues a one-minute warning and delays continue, the “burned ball” rule should be placed in effect and one of the offending player’s balls will be removed from the court.

### **Game Notes:**

- Consecutive or alternating throws by teammates shall be at the option of the players.
  - Any time a player is in action, opposing players should be off the court or far behind the player if courts don’t have adequate space.
  - If a player plays the wrong color ball, simply replace it with the correct color when it comes to rest. Play continues.
  - If a player commits a foot foul while in the act of shooting volo or raffa, a warning is issued for the first offense. Should the same player foul again, the thrown ball is removed from play and all struck balls returned to their approximate original positions. USBF NOTE: Unless there is a referee in the court, this would be a very difficult rule to enforce and should be addressed by the tournament Director before tournament begins.
- END NOTE

- If a player rolls/shoots out of turn or plays more balls than allowed, the opposing team has two (2) options. Leave all balls as they rest, or remove the illegally thrown ball from play and return all other ball/s to previous positions.

### **Back Wall Terms:**

“Back Wall Dead” - The USBF rule meaning any thrown ball is void that touches the back wall prior to touching any other ball or pallino on the court. The thrown ball is removed from the court. Any balls that were struck after the thrown ball hit the back wall are returned to their previous position.

“Back Wall Live” – A more lenient “house rule” under which all thrown balls that hit the back wall are valid throws, with or without striking another ball or pallino on the court. All thrown balls and any struck balls remain in play on the court wherever they come to rest.

### **Summary:**

The intent of the USBF Open Rules is to provide a guideline for playing the game of Bocce consistently throughout the United States. These rules are used at the USBF National Championships and are strongly recommended for any level of tournaments or leagues from social to competitive events. For further information or questions regarding these rules, court construction and USBF events, please go to the [www.USBF.US](http://www.USBF.US) webpage

MARCH 2023 Updates: Pallino placement, restarting a void frame at same end of court, clarification of ball color and size (106-107mm) and back wall terms