

## Boules: The Absolutely True Origins

Just this week I was asked to play a game of bocce ball with friends over beers and I wondered where that came from. Not the beer, thankfully I know where that comes from (the Beer Store). And not the friends, I know that after they have exhausted a long line of contacts in their mobile device, I am a welcome last option and we can gather and exchange air-COVID high-fives over winning shots. No, I wondered where bocce ball came from. Here's the deal:

Long before bocce ball and Europeans washed ashore in North America, the game was played in Europe, originating in France as the game known as Boules. The inventor was a simple rural man named Henri. Many historians say his surname was Boules but that is not the case, his family name is not known. It was 1453, the year that was to be the final year of the Hundred Years war between France and England, and Henri was cooking some dinner which consisted of a hard-boiled egg and 4 meatballs. Just then news came to town (by way of the town crier Pierrette whose voice could truly curl your toes) that the war had ended. Henri's distraction caused the eggs and meatballs to over cook, well past anything that could be considered edible in any century, and Henri threw the rock hard egg out the open window in disgust, landing it some 40 feet away in his back yard near where the turnips were planted and where he emptied his excrement pot. A crow who had been digging in one pile or other, took notice of the egg, but scattered quickly when a meatball followed, landing inches from the egg then rolling quite a distance away. The crow is a very intelligent creature, even in 1453, and it cackled and cawed and flapped its wings as it mocked Henri's toss. Henri threw the next one a little shorter but it hit a mound of soft material and bounded to the left. The crow hopped in circles, beak to the sky and whistled and chirped in disdain. Henri threw the next one even shorter and lower so it wouldn't bounce as much but it stopped short by 10 feet. The crow stood in silence and just shook its head. So Henri took the last meatball in his fingers, spun it around and weighed the possibilities, then instead of throwing it he carefully rolled it with considerable speed in the direction of the egg. It was perfect. It came to rest nuzzled against the egg. The crow stood in awe for a few seconds, then bent over and ate the perfect shot in one bite, and turned away to begin the long digestive process necessary for week-old roadkill that had been ground then cooked to the consistency of a brick no less sound than those used for the local cathedral.

While Henri continued to perfect his game of egg and meatballs, and essentially feed the crow he had nicknamed Jacques with the food that he should have been eating, the countryside was overrun with English tourists flooding the countryside, finally able to visit after 100 years of war and insults. Some of these tourists came across Henri and his game and asked to play. More eggs and meatballs were required and soon Henri realized he was to be bankrupted by the game. When asked what it was called, he attempted to reply that he was a "fool" but what they heard was "Bool". This is where what has thus far been a pretty straight-forward account of the game of Boules gets weird (yes, now, not before ... stay with me...). Henri suffered from a little-known disease called Billier's Blight, where the individual substitutes the sound of the letter "B" at the beginning of words. This had caused Henri to be teased and alone for much of his life. He had never married. In fact, his only romantic relationship had been with a girl named Micheline whom he had met at the local tavern's annual "*speed dating for peasant's*" event. He had called her Mich for short but sadly not for long.

And now you know where the game of Boules originated. There are other small details, such as the English calling the small white object a "jack" in honour of Jacques the crow who was by now fat and had gout in his feet. Centuries later it is said that a travelling cheese salesman from Parma, Italy named Bruno Bocce appropriated the game to Italy and eventually the Americas but these stories are ridiculous and we shouldn't accept such nonsense just because someone writes it down. Other tall tales fabricated over the years are that Boules is French for "an egg and meatballs", or simply "balls", but we mustn't believe such stories that make a mockery of history. As my dear sweet church-going grandmother used to say between spits of her chewing tobacco, "they're all lyin' bastards tellin' ya shit ya ought not be believin' ..." Oh Grandma, so true, so true.