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Bouleing over the opposition

By [Brett Williamson](#)

Standing in a gravel field in the middle of Prospect, surrounded by the autumn colours of Golden Ash trees, the laughter of children playing and the dull knock of a hammer from a building site intermittently echoing through, a group of grey-haired over 60s are plotting the downfall of an invading force. They are members of an elite team; the Australian Pétanque Over 60s squad that will travel to Melbourne this weekend for the trans-Tasman challenge.

The group laughs and shares jibes as they practice for the weekend tournament, but as you get closer, you start to notice the concentration and tactics behind the smiles that have propelled the players into the international league.

Team Captain Brett Williams began playing the sport in 1995.

He originally switched to the sport after searching for a new challenge that was less taxing on his body, spending several years of playing hockey.

"Walking up and down is quite a nice thing to do for older people."



Prospect pétanque players get ready for the trans-Tasman challenge. (Brett Williamson)

Team members Antonio Stojic, Brett Williams, Allan Sanderson, Dave Ward, Mike Mulvihill, Valmai Nicoll, Lianne Healey and Glenis Head will spend around two hours this afternoon tossing boules, talking tactics and making final adjustments to their games before travelling to Melbourne for the competition. With team manager Sue Williams, coach Adrian Clements and four players from NSW the Australian Over 60s pétanque team is ready to take on New Zealand for the '2011 Trans Tasman Pétanque Challenge'.

A game that might seem straight forward and simple is a myriad of rules and can often take up to two hours to complete.

"We have competitions that start at 9:30am and might finish at 5, 6 o'clock at night."

Game pace and the distance of the initial throw play strong parts in the strategy of each game.

Pétanque: the basics

Derived from the French words 'ped' (foot), and 'tanco' (post), the sport's name loosely translates to the stance that is made when the boule is released, with 'both feet firmly on the ground'.

Developed by two brothers who wished to play a game that was similar to bocce, but was suitable for the brother who was in a wheelchair, the playing field was shortened and an underarm lob introduced.

A small circle, between 35 and 50 cm, is drawn on the ground and the team that wins a toss throws the *cochonnet* or *jack* between six to ten metres, followed by the toss of the first boule.

The team that lost the toss then throws it boules until it stops a shot closer to the cochonnet than the opposition.

Both feet must be firmly on the ground when casting the door.

Once closer, the turn is changed to the other team until all boules have been tossed.

Points are scored by the amount of boules a team has closest to the cochonnet inside the closest of the opposing teams.

The first team to total 13 points wins.

A circle is then drawn around the position of the cochonnet, and the next game begins from that point, either back towards the previous starting point, or in a new direction.

Pétanque in SA

Although numbers have dropped a little of the past few years, memberships of local club's are still quite strong, with Prospect boasting 60 to 70.

"A lot of those are just social people who want to come out and enjoy themselves on a Wednesday or a Sunday or Sunday afternoon."

Members meet at the Prospect Pétanque Club on Buchanan Street, Nailsworth on these afternoons each week, with guests and new players welcome.