

In a Spin

In the first article, *Get a Grip*, we looked at the importance of the correct grip, throw and release of the boule. To recap:

- Fingers together
- The thumb is *not* used to grip the boule
- The boule 'rests' in the fingers and then touches the palm of the hand.
- Smooth swing, release and follow-through
- The boule 'rolls out' from the fingers
- Straight follow-through and hand horizontal on release

All of this is designed to ensure the boule spins and travels in a straight line. We did mention in passing that, if you turn the hand to the side, the boule will spin sideways. This is what we're going to look at in more detail.

When to spin

Most of the time you want to play a straight, 'natural', without any side spin. However, there are times when spinning the boule sideways can help:

- To avoid blocking boules
- To avoid a stony patch, thick gravel or other obstacle that hinders a straight point
- To counter the slope on the terrain

Supposing the opponent's first boule is about 50cm in front of the jack. You decide to point – for the moment, let's assume that is the correct tactical decision for the terrain and abilities of the team. The ideal play is to spin the boule and curve it in so that it's now closer to the jack. The best point will be between the opponent's boule and the jack. This will now make any shot much more difficult and also, it will be harder for the opponents to out-point your boule. Anything to either side is too exposed and easy to shoot.

True, it's a more difficult play but it's the difference between a 'good' player and an 'expert'.

How to spin the boule

There are various ways to spin a boule but let's look at the basic options. NB This is written for a right-handed player. If you are left-handed then the mirror-image will apply.

Firstly, you use the same grip, backswing and follow-through of the boule. The difference is that you turn your hand, such that your palm is facing the direction in which you want the boule to turn.

The hand is turned such that the palm is pointing towards the left. The important thing is that you use the same throw, so that the boule *rolls out* from the fingers, but this time across them, leaving the little finger last, and the boule will spin from right to left.



Here is the follow-through with the palm facing towards the left.



Below, the hand is turned so that the palm is pointing to the right. The important thing is that you throw and release the boule is the same way as a natural shot. Because the hand is turned, the boule will spin sideways and curve from left to right. Because the hand is vertical, the last point of contact becomes the index finger. Care should be taken not to attempt this without a good warm-up as the hand position creates a twist in the upper arm and can damage cold muscles.



. Here we see the follow-through: the hand remains turned, palm facing towards the right.



Practising

Spinning the boule accurately is a difficult shot to learn. It will take a lot of practice. To start with, it's a case of getting a 'feel' for the throw. The real basis – of all throws – is to feel the 'rolling out' from the fingers and how this puts spin on the boule.

To practise spinning sideways, initially just throw boules spinning to the left (forehand) and see how much you can make them turn. Then attempt to throw boules spinning to the right. Don't worry about a jack or target, This is purely to get a 'feel' for spinning the boules and to observe that spinning in either direction is possible.

It's easier to practise on a fairly smooth, flat terrain, i.e. where you don't have to worry about a slope or stones that can deflect the boule. Most players find that it's easier to spin in one direction than the other but it's important to practise both sides. The objective is that you should be equally competent in spinning in either direction.

Once you've got a basic feel for spinning the boule, you then need to develop accuracy. Start either by placing an obstruction, a length of wood, a hoop or spare boules, about 2m in front of the jack and a boule about midpoint between the obstruction and the jack.

Whether squatting or standing, your foot position should be such that you are aligned to land the boule to the appropriate side of the obstruction. Now practise spinning boules from each side, trying to beat the barrier and, ideally, trying to get between the boule and the jack, rather than just to the side.

It's important to practise on both sides, not just the 'easy' side. As you improve, you can reduce the distance between the front boule and the jack.

One thing to remember is that deliberately side-spinning a boule means that you have reduced the normal backspin so the boules tend to go further. To counteract this, you must play more softly or add more height to the delivery. Another factor which can make a difference is the hardness of the terrain and how much 'cover' there is on it. Deep cover responds less well to sidespin as the boule needs to 'bite' on something firm to turn properly. Similarly, very soft surfaces give less turn and it may be possible to play a very high straight lob instead to achieve the same result.

Just to complicate matters... remember that there are three basic pointing shots:

- rolling
- half-lob
- full or high-lob

You can apply spin to all of these, or anything in between. However, you'll probably find that spinning a boule sideways with a high-lob is a pretty difficult shot. I guess it's the difference between a good player and a World Champion.

Spinning on a slope

Spinning a boule can help you counteract the effect of a slope on the terrain. If you have an open terrain to play on, you'll probably want to play a 'natural' shot but taking into account the slope on the terrain, i.e. if the terrain slopes to the right, you simply play to the left to compensate.

However, supposing the opponents played first, reading the terrain correctly, and there's now a boule slightly to the left but directly on the line you wanted to take. If you take the same line, you risk knocking them closer. If you play a 'natural' shot, i.e. straight to the jack, the slope is likely to take your boule to the right. An option is now to play a straighter shot to the jack but spinning the boule to the left. If you've judged it correctly, you will counteract the slope and beat the opponent's boule.

How spinning helps you to play straight

Learning to spin a boule can also help you to play straight. The reason is that you're learning how to control the boule better. You should be developing a better 'feel' for your shots and will be more aware that the boule can curve to the right or to the left.

When you warm up, observe how the boule spins: straight or sideways. It's easier to do this if you use a striped boule rather than a smooth one as it makes it easier to see the spin.

If you find that the majority of your points already deviate in one direction, you may well find you're inadvertently side-spinning it and need to correct your throwing action.

Good luck and get spinning!

Authors : Ray Ager & Brian Stote