



Special Olympics  
Minnesota  
**Bocce Handbook**

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Practice ideas, skill assessment and development, and rules can be found in the SOI Quick Start Guides and SOI Rules for each respective sport at [www.specialolympics.org/sports.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/sports.aspx).

# Special Olympics Minnesota Bocce Handbook

## BOCCE RULES FOR COMPETITION

Rules of competition for the International Federation for Bocce and Special Olympics Inc. will be used for all events conducted by Special Olympics Minnesota. The rules listed below are highlights of the rules of competition along with any rule exceptions.

### TRADITIONAL BOCCE

#### Traditional Court

- The court is an area 12 feet wide by 60 feet long.
- The court surface may be composed of stone dust, dirt, clay, grass or artificial surface, provided there is no permanent or temporary obstruction in the court that would interfere with the straight line delivery of a ball from any direction. These obstructions do not include variations in grade, consistency or terrain.
- The foul line shooting should be marked 10 feet from the back end line.
- The half-court line should be marked at 30 feet. During the course of play, the position of the pallina may change as a result of normal play; however, the pallina may never come to rest closer than the half-court line or the frame is considered dead.

#### Equipment

- Bocce balls may be manufactured of wood or a composition material and must be of equal
- size. Official tournament balls will be 107 millimeters. The color of the balls is
- immaterial provided that the four balls of one team are clearly and visibly distinct from the four balls of the opposing team.
- The pallina will be 60 millimeters.

#### Rules of competition

- The Game (25 minute maximum)
  - There are four balls to a side or team.
  - A coin toss by the referee will determine which team has the pallina and choice of ball color.
  - **Three attempt rule** – The team possessing the pallina will have three attempts at placing the pallina beyond the 30-foot line and before the 10-foot line on the opposite end. If these three attempts are unsuccessful, the opposing team will have one opportunity to place the pallina.

- If this attempt is unsuccessful, the referee will place the pallina in the center of the court at the 50-foot mark (opposite end foul line). However, at no time does a team lose its earned pallina advantage of being able to deliver the first ball.
- **Sequence of play** – The pallina is rolled or tossed by a member of the team having won the coin toss to start the game. The player tossing the pallina must deliver the first ball. The opposing team will then deliver their bocce balls until the point is taken or they have exhausted their four balls. This “nearest ball” rule governs the sequence of played balls. The side whose ball is the closest to the pallina is called the “in” ball and the opposing side the “out” ball. Whenever a team gets “in,” it steps aside and allows the “out” team to deliver.
- **Initial point** – It is always incumbent upon the team with the pallina advantage to establish the initial point. Example: Team A tosses the pallina and delivers the first ball. Team B elects to hit Team A’s ball out of position. In doing so, both balls, Team A’s and Team B’s, fly out of the court, leaving only the pallina in the court. It is incumbent upon Team A to re-establish the initial point.
- Ball delivery – A team has the option of rolling, tossing, bouncing, banking, etc., its ball down the court, provided it does not go out of bounds or the player does not violate the foul markers. A player also has the option of hitting out any ball in play in trying to obtain a point or decrease the opposing team’s points. A player can grip the ball by placing his/her hand over or under the ball as long as the ball is released in an underhand delivery. An underhand delivery is defined as releasing the ball below the waist.
- Special Olympics Minnesota staff or Event Management volunteers will have the discretion to allow for certain modifications/interpretations of ball delivery based upon a physical disability characteristic.
- **Number of balls played by a player** – In singles, each player will play four balls. In Unified doubles, each player will play two balls.
- Coaching
  - Strategy discussions with any athlete and/or partner are prohibited once the match begins.
  - If an official determines that a coach, partner or spectator is violating this rule, the official may sanction the offending individual. Sanctions may include verbal warning, citing the coach/partner with unsportsmanlike conduct or expulsion from the game.
  - **Scoring** – At the end of each frame (when both teams have exhausted all balls), scoring will be determined as follows: Points are awarded to the team whose balls are closer to the pallina than the closest ball of the opposing team. The players (not coaches or spectators) have a right to request a measurement if the players disagree with the referee. The scoring team for each frame will also win the pallina advantage for the subsequent frame.
  - In singles and Unified doubles, matches will conclude when one person or team has reached 12 points.
- Substitutions
  - Because divisions are set in advance by assessment scores, substitutions for registered teams are not allowed. Another person will be allowed to play for an absent player; however, the team will receive participation ribbons.

## Divisioning

- All athletes and partners must submit assessment scores to be used in divisioning.
  - A coach places the pallina at the 30-foot line, and the player plays eight balls. The coach will measure the closest three balls and record their distance in centimeters.
  - A coach places the pallina at the 40-foot line, and the player plays eight balls. The coach will measure the closest three balls and record their distance in centimeters.
  - A coach places the pallina at the 50-foot line, and the player plays eight balls. The coach will measure the closest three balls and record their distance in centimeters.
  - During the assessment process, if the pallina is moved from its spot at 30 feet, 40 feet or 50 feet, it is to be replaced on the spot before the next ball is rolled and before any measurements are taken.
  - Measurements will be taken from the center side of the bocce ball to the center side of the pallina, for a total of nine measurements, the sum of which becomes the player's assessment score.
  - For Unified Doubles, the team assessment score will be the sum of each player's individual assessment score.

## MODIFIED BOCCE

This event is designed for lower ability or mobility athletes who do not have the physical skills to put a regulation 60 millimeters pallina into play or place a regulation 107 millimeters ball past half-court. If an athlete can successfully do either of these skills on a consistent basis, they should be entered in the Traditional Bocce.

Modified Bocce will be conducted under the above rules with the following exceptions:

- Pitch length will be 40 feet.
- Athletes will not switch ends between frames.
- The end of the pitch from which play originates will remain open.
- Ball size will be 90 millimeters and pallina size 40 millimeters.
- The athlete assessment scores for modified bocce participants will be based on pallina placements at 10, 20 and 30 feet for modified bocce versus 30, 40 and 50 feet for standard play.
- Modified Unified Doubles will also be offered. An athlete may be paired with a Unified Partner and will be divisioned in the event based on the modified assessment scores for each doubles player.
- Ramps will be allowed in Modified Bocce only, although we are hopeful those athletes can participate successfully in the modified events without a ramp. Participants using a ramp will be divisioned based on their assessment score and placed in a ramp division when participation allows.

## COMPETITION AND DIVISIONING

### Area Competitions

Area 3	Date	Location	City	Register	Contact
Area 1&2	TBD	Oakland Park	Thief River Falls	July 13	<a href="mailto:dani.druse@somn.org">dani.druse@somn.org</a>
Area 4	July 20	Romkey Park	Moorhead	July 3	<a href="mailto:leah.wolkow@somn.org">leah.wolkow@somn.org</a>
Area 7	July 12	Otsego VFW Fields	Elk River	June 26	<a href="mailto:emily.dierberger@somn.org">emily.dierberger@somn.org</a>
Area 6/8	July 8	Dirks Park	Olivia	June 18	<a href="mailto:lukas.johnson@somn.org">lukas.johnson@somn.org</a>
Area 9/10	July 16	Foster Arend Park	Rochester	July 2	<a href="mailto:lukas.johnson@somn.org">lukas.johnson@somn.org</a>
Area 11	July 23	Louisiana Oaks Park	Saint Louis Park	July 9	<a href="mailto:sam.leidholt@somn.org">sam.leidholt@somn.org</a>
Area 12	July 24	Hidden Greens	Hastings	July 9	<a href="mailto:sam.leidholt@somn.org">sam.leidholt@somn.org</a>
Area 13	July 15	Sunny Acres Park	TBD	June 28	<a href="mailto:emily.dieberger@somn.org">emily.dieberger@somn.org</a>

### State Competition

Date	Location	City	Quota Due	Register By
August 18-20	HealthEast Sports Complex	Woodbury	July 21	July 30

### Competition Details

- Athletes who participate at State Bocce will not be able to additionally register for golf or softball during Fall Games.
- Singles are on Saturday and Sunday (must plan on being there both days or participation award is given)
- Doubles are on Sunday
- All awards are on Sunday
- Traditional Singles, Doubles, Unified Doubles are offered
- Modified Singles, Doubles, Unified Doubles are offered
- Modified Ramp Singles, Modified Ramp Doubles, Unified Ramp Doubles are offered
- Players or teams are guaranteed three games in each event
- Athletes may enter Singles and Doubles
- Athletes may only enter one Doubles event
- The pitches will be on artificial turf with PVC borders

Coaches need to complete assessment scores for each athlete and partner. Scores are submitted on the registration form.

Divisioning in bocce is typically done in divisions of three or four players or teams to accommodate scheduling. Athletes will be guaranteed three games.

Once divisioning and scheduling is completed, any scratch will generally lead to rescheduling the entire division. This has to be done because in most cases, a scratch results in one player or team only having the opportunity to play one game, which is not desirable in any competition. For this reason, it is VERY important to let staff know of any scratches you can in advance as well as check the division schedules often during competition.

## **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Good sportsmanship is both the coach's and athlete's commitment to fair play, ethical behavior and integrity. In perception and practice, sportsmanship is defined as those qualities which are characterized by generosity and genuine concern for others. Below we highlight a few focus points and ideas on how to teach and coach sportsmanship to your athletes. Lead by example.

### **Competitive Effort**

- Put forth maximum effort during each event.
- Practice the skills with the same intensity as you would perform them in competition.
- Always finish a match/event: Never quit.

### **Fair Play at All Times**

- Always comply with the rules.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship and fair play at all times.
- Respect the decision of the officials at all times.
- Coaching
- Strategy discussions with any athlete and/or partner are prohibited once the match begins.
- If an official determines that a coach, partner or spectator is violating this rule, the official may sanction the offending individual. Sanctions may include verbal warning, citing the coach/partner with unsportsmanlike conduct or expulsion from the game.
- *Scoring* – At the end of each frame (when both teams have exhausted all balls), scoring will be determined as follows: Points are awarded to the team whose balls are closer to the pallina than the closest ball of the opposing team. The players (not coaches or spectators) have a right to request a measurement if the players disagree with the referee. The scoring team for each frame will also win the pallina advantage for the subsequent frame.
- In singles and Unified doubles, matches will conclude when one person or team has reached 12 points.

## **STRUCTURING YOUR TRAINING SESSIONS**

The nature of the sport of bocce, much like bowling, does not lend itself well to the use of drills and/or breaking down the sport into its components for the purposes of skill development. Isolated skills that can be worked on individually include aiming, learning how hard a ball must be thrown to travel a short distance versus a long distance, and how hard a ball must be thrown to move another ball or the pallina. Drills around these skills will not take a great deal of time, however, but the general breakdown of your training sessions can be done as outlined below.

### **Warm-up and Stretch (10-15 minutes)**

- Every athlete must participate in the warm-up and stretch period on or near the court (i.e., shadow body movements).
- Stretch each muscle group while waiting to practice rolling/bowling action.

### **Skills Instruction (15-20 minutes)**

- Quickly review previously taught skills.
- Introduce the theme of the skills activity.
- Demonstrate the skills simply and dramatically.
- Physically assist and prompt lower ability players when necessary.
- Introduce and practice new skills early in the practice session.

### **Competition Experience (One, two, or three games)**

- Athletes learn a lot by simply playing the game. The game is a great teacher. Be sure to have coaches available to give feedback and instruction during play.

### **Cool-down, Stretch and Review (10-15 minutes)**

- Every athlete should participate in a cool-down period following a training session. The stretching of each muscle group should not be as vigorous as the warm-up. This is a good time to reflect on the good points of the training session, highlighting any progress various athletes have made, but remember not to do this at the detriment of other athletes who may not have achieved as much. Time can also be spent on areas where you may need to work during the next session. You should always finish the training session, whether it was good or not so good, with some fun and laughter.



## SKILL DEVELOPMENT TIPS

### The Grip

In order to be able to roll or toss a bocce ball, an athlete must first understand what the feeling is like to grip the bocce ball correctly.

- Pick up and bring to waist level.
- Ensure ball is sitting in the palm of your hand.
- Ensure fingers are spread evenly across bottom of ball.
- Thumb is used to hold ball in place, not as a pressure point.
- Slightly close all fingers evenly around ball.
- Please note that the ball can also be held in inverted position, although this is not entirely suitable for players with small hands.

### Teaching points

- Make sure the player identifies his/her ball by the color.
- Make sure the player has control over the weight/size of ball.
- While the athlete is holding the ball, look at spread of fingers underneath the bocce ball.
- Ensure ball is sitting on front portion of hand rather than near the back, by wrist.
- As a test to see if an athlete is ready to play with an inverted grip, ask the athlete to invert his/her hand, with a ball held in it, to ensure the ball is sitting securely and doesn't drop from hand.

### Coaching tips

- Athlete is able to hold bocce ball snugly in the hand.
- Athlete is able to have full control of the bocce ball while it is in the hand.
- Emphasize that the hand controls the ball's direction, speed and distance, so it is important that the ball is held correctly to ensure a good result.
- You may have to help the athlete who has smaller hands and may not be able to grip the ball correctly and therefore has little/no control of the bocce ball.

### The Stance

In order to be able to roll or toss a bocce ball, an athlete must first understand what the feeling is like to stand correctly when delivering the ball. It is important that the athlete has a good, evenly balanced base to start from.

- Spread feet slightly apart, the width of your shoulders.
- Ensure that you hold the shoulders level and the body square to target with weight evenly distributed.
- Take one step forward before moving arms.

- The one step forward should be on the opposite leg to the arm with which you will roll, i.e., a right-handed athlete steps with the left foot forward.
- Ensure the step is not too large or too narrow; step should be slightly more narrow than shoulder width.
- Bend knee slightly to encourage relaxation.
- Ensure your feet are pointing toward the target.
- Remember to always focus your eyes on the target.

### **Delivery and release**

- Push the ball forward to approximately eye level followed by a downward swing.
- Bring your arm straight back, close to your body.
- Keep your elbow straight and take your weight mainly on the back foot.
- As you smoothly bring your arm straight forward, transfer your weight to your front foot.
- As your arm passes close to your leg, your weight should be balanced between both feet.
- Release ball onto the court surface just in front of you.
- Continue moving hand forward and upward in a natural follow-through motion.
- Keep front foot behind the foul line and shoulders square to the target.
- This stance is taken when delivering the ball in a tossing motion as well as a rolling motion.

### **Delivery from a Stepping Position**

- Spread feet slightly apart, the width of the shoulders.
- Ensure that you hold your shoulders level and body square to target with weight evenly distributed.
- Take one step forward as delivery arm begins moving.
- The one step forward should be on the opposite leg to the arm with which you will roll, i.e., a right handed athlete steps with the left foot forward.
- Ensure the step is not too large or too narrow; step should be slightly more narrow than shoulder width.
- Ensure your feet are pointing toward the target.
- Remember to always focus your eyes on the target.

### **Delivery and Release**

- As you begin to take the first step, push the ball forward to approximately eye level followed by a downward swing.
- Bring your arm straight back, close to your body.
- Keep your elbow straight and take your weight mainly on the back foot.
- When the ball is at its peak on the backswing, the front foot should be firmly planted to give the maximum balance.
- As you smoothly bring your arm straight forward, transfer your weight to your front foot.
- As your arm passes close to your leg, your weight should be balanced between both feet.
- Release ball onto the court surface just in front of you.
- Continue moving hand forward and upward in a natural follow-through motion.

- Keep front foot behind the foul line and shoulders square to the target.
- This stance is taken when delivering the ball in a tossing motion as well as a rolling motion.

### **The Pointing Shot**

This bocce shot is a gentle, smooth shot. It is generally rolled, as opposed to being thrown or tossed, and it is used to either gain a point or increase the number of points already held. This is in contrast to trying to displace other balls through a forceful delivery.

- The Stance
  - The athlete spreads the feet slightly apart, the width of the shoulders.
  - Take one step forward on the opposite leg to the arm with which the athlete rolls, i.e., a right-handed athlete steps with the left foot forward.
  - Ensure the feet are pointing toward the target. Remind athletes that they should always focus their eyes on the target or target area.
- The Delivery
  - Push the ball forward to approximately eye level followed by a downward swing.
  - Have athlete bring his/her arm straight back, close to the body.
  - Remind him/her to keep the elbow straight and take the weight mainly on the back foot.
  - As he/she smoothly brings the arm straight forward, he/she should transfer the weight to the front foot.
  - As the arm passes close to the leg, the weight should be balanced between both feet.
- The Release
  - Have athlete release the ball onto the court surface just in front of him or her.
  - Continue moving the hand forward and upward in a natural follow-through motion.
  - Remind him/her to keep the front foot behind the foul line and shoulders square to the target at all times.
  - This shot can also be played with a tossing motion, although it is not as commonly used with this action.

### **The Hitting/Spocking Shot**

The hitting or spocking shot is a powerful shot. It is rolled or thrown with great force to displace the ball or balls to either gain the point by displacing the opponent's balls or reduce the number of points the opponent is holding. This is in contrast to trying to get your ball closer through a slow, gentle roll-up. The stance, delivery and release are the same as in the pointing shot, but the ball is delivered with a higher velocity.