



Stags' Leap

BOCCE AND CHOOSING SIDES: THE ONGOING ARGUMENT

The first thing to know about Bocce is that it invites rivalries and teasing. The feistier human instincts get formed into dark-colored balls. These are rolled across a court seeking intimate contact with a notion of purity and excellence in the form of a smaller white ball. Each roll of the ball elicits a subject for a joke. The jokesters are the ones rolling the balls and loitering in the chairs next to the Bocce court. Every opportunity for a reasonably funny disagreement is taken up and explored.

It starts with who is going to be on what team. Will it be the red wine drinkers versus the white wine drinkers? What about the employees against the distributors? Women opposing the men? Shoe size? Those without cell phones versus the technologically over-equipped?

This settled, anyone new to Bocce quickly realizes that the people you've chosen to be on the opposite team are going to be the very ones you'll be lounging next to for the duration of the game. When you have a big enough group to use four-person teams, two members of each team remain standing at either end of the court, next to a pair from the opposing team, taking turns tossing balls during alternate innings.

As soon as the balls have been tossed and it's time to count points, if the least doubt arises over whose bocce ball is closest to the little white pollino, the next controversy begins. At Stags' Leap, belts are not allowed on court. Taking a measurement using a strip of leather with regularly spaced holes would solve the problem too easily. The captains of both teams have to stand in the court over the balls and have a leisurely discussion about the whole situation, which might include references to winemaking practices, global positioning, the weather, and astronomy.

Playing at Stags' Leap also carries with it the humbling task of beginning play by raking bobcat prints and olives off the court. The court is located below the Sensory Garden, from



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which, on bright summer mornings, the fragrance of a dozen different scented geraniums drifts on the breeze. Below the court, across a low stone wall, is the vineyard known as *The Leap*, where the estate Cabernet vines have tucked their brief blossoms into round fruit. Above the court, behind the gardens and cottages, is a drama of mountain known as the Stags Leap Palisades, whose multi-million-year-old flanks are the ultimate referee in any game of skill and chance.

So, a game of Bocce provides opportunity for controversy and beauty, rivalry and drama of setting, all the makings for great opera, which makes sense given the Italian origins of the sport. However, in the end, what seems most obvious is that Bocce is a one-handed game invented by a winemaker. What wine is it exactly that goes best with Bocce, and what food is most delicious when exerting yourself casually and hilariously? Here the decisive winner is sometimes difficult to pinpoint, due to the fact that in order to judge, the picnic must be consumed, and then, gradually, the eyes soften, the tossing of the balls becomes a little less precise, and ultimately it may be that the game ends with the team captains no longer even keeping track of the points.

By now it is late in the afternoon, and it is exactly this time of day when it's most pleasant to be out on the property, watching the light deepen in color and develop shadows. The sun leans heavily on the Mayacamas range to the east, splitting its loyalties between the greater Napa Valley beyond, and the two hills that mark the entrance to the Stags' Leap estate. Vineyard and bocce player alike are bathed in a warm glow known locally as Sideways Light. The picnic lies in graceful ruin on the tables next to the court.



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Intimacy...the little kiss (*boccie* in Italian;
when a ball taps another ball,
the balls are said to *kiss*)

Suggested food and wine pairings:

Libations for bocce can be interchangeable between reds and whites: cool fresh Viognier with a cold smoked salmon pizza, or a spicy ceviche; red Rhônes with tender lamb, either Petite Syrah for the after-game barbeque, or Syrah, when roasting or braising.

See our special wine offer in this newsletter, *The Bocce Duo*, a pair of Rhônes, red and white

See our website for the rules of *Palisades Bocce*, a variant of bocce played at Stags' Leap Winery: <http://www.stagsleap.com/art/literature.html>

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For more newsletter articles, see: <http://www.stagsleap.com/art/literature.html>

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