

HAWAIIAN RULES BOCCE

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Introduction

Add “Hawaiian Rules” to the name of any traditional game and you can imagine a sport with hang loose rules designed for extra fun and excitement. Hawaiian Rules Bocce (H.R. Bocce) is just such a sport; developed on the UH Manoa Campus by faculty and staff of the Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Science. H.R. Bocce is a new version of an ancient game for the modern world.

Bocce is an ancient game that spread throughout Palestine and into Asia Minor (4). In 600 B.C the game was recognized by the Greeks and later achieve great popularity with the Romans. A Bocce Olympiad was held in Athens Greece in 1896 with international tournaments still held today (4). Italian immigrants brought Bocce to the United States in the early 1900’s with initial centers of popularity of New York City and San Francisco (1). The game experienced resurgence in California in the 1970’s and based on web sites listed below (2,3) has gained increasing popularity.

The traditional Bocce game is played on a court bound by raised edges and backboards at the ends. The court has a hard packed surface in the shape of rectangle 60 to 80 feet long and 12 feet wide. Teams have one, two or four players per side. Each side has 4 balls. A team scores by rolling their balls closer to the target ball than the other team. H.R. Bocce was developed with some of the same basic scoring elements of the traditional game with changes made to other aspects to make use of undulating fine turf surfaces and enhance individual competition.

H.R. Bocce was developed at the UHM Magoon Greenhouse Facility in Manoa Valley. What started out as a turf maintenance training area now doubles as a pau hana (after work) sports turf facility. H.R. Bocce, described for the first time with this publication, rapidly evolved into a well defined variant of the traditional sport. The original developers include Craig Okazaki, James Leary, Doug Hamasaki, Joe DeFrank and H.C. ‘Skip’ Bittenbender. We imagined H.R. Bocce as an excellent complement to Hawaiian resorts, commercial landscapes, parks and home lawns. This is highly competitive game is easy to learn, requires limited infrastructure and is fun for all ages and genders.

Playing surface

We see two main versions of the playing surface for H.R. Bocce. One is a surface similar to a putting green designed to provide a variety of up and down hill play and graded to enhance right and left hand breaks. The other version resembles a miniature golf course where play is directed through a series of fairways. Before the beginning of play, teams decide on any out of bound areas. Balls played into these areas are not counted for scoring.

Group Play

In traditional Bocce, teams of 1,2 or 4 people compete against each other. In H.R. Bocce 2, 3 or 4 people play against each other in much the same way golfers do. The cut throat aspect of H.R. Bocce allows for each player to release 2 balls per frame with points awarded to only one player per frame.

How the game is played.

For this article, play is describe for a 4 player match on an irregularly shaped triangular court with any ball off the grass as Out-of-Bounds (OB). The first player to obtain 5 points wins and must win by two points. The players are using a 4 color Bocce set consisting of two each of red, green, yellow and blue balls. The set also contains a white target ball called the pallino. The last component of the set is an object to mark the throwing position of each frame called the Pohaku (rock in Hawaiian). For convenience the Pohaku is a retractable measuring tape that marks the center of the throwing release circle and can be used to determine scoring at the end of a frame.

The first objective of the game is to determine the order of play for the first frame. To do this, someone delivers the pallino in play and each player rolls 1 ball. The player closest to the pallino starts the first scoring frame with the remaining players following in order based on closeness to the pallino. In our example, Red is closest to the pallino followed by Blue, Yellow and Green. On a traditional Bocce court, players must release their balls from behind a fault line. In H.R. Bocce, the Pohaku is set at the center of an imaginary 1-meter circle from which the pallino and all other balls are release. In other words, players must have at least one foot within this imaginary circle when they release their balls. The purpose of this throwing circle is to confine movement thus defining the line of play and obstacles to ball release and tracking. If a player releases from outside the circle, that ball is removed from play and in-play balls that are moved are returned to their original locations. The player committing this foot fault must play any remaining balls.

Once the Pohaku is set and the pallino placed in play, Red delivers a ball and try's to get as close to the pallino as possible. It is ok to hit the pallino and move it to any location in play. If the pallino is knocked OB at any time, the frame is replayed. If the pallino is thrown OB at the start of a scoring frame the next player in order can set a new Pohaku location and place the pallino in play, with the OB thrower going last. So, Red is in play Blue rolls next followed by Yellow and Green. After the first roll, the order of play is based on closeness to the pallino. In our imaginary game, Blue is farthest and must roll again. After Blue rolls the order of play is again determine by closeness to the pallino of the remaining players. Now Red is farthest away and rolls a second time. Yellow is away when the Red ball stops and rolls a second ball. After Green rolls it is time to score the frame. Green got lucky and has two balls closer than any other player and gets two points. Only one player per frame can receive points, thus after 1 frame the score is Green = 2, Red = 0, Blue = 0 and Yellow = 0. Since Green scored in the last frame, he can set the Pohaku in any location and set the pallino in play with no restrictions of distance, obstacles to play or sight of the pallino. Green rolls the first ball and the other players roll in order based on closeness to the pallino in the previous frame. Play continues in this manner until someone scores 5 points and must win by 2 points.

A rule unique to H.R. Bocce is the 1-kick rule and only applies to the final location of the pallino. The 1-kick rule applies when the person setting the pallino in play wants to change that location. They may kick the pallino once to set the final location. This maneuver must be a kick, not a push or slide, just one kick.

Design Considerations for H.R. Bocce

Although H.R. Bocce is fun on almost any surface, a fine turf surface really takes the game to a higher level of competition and skill. At UHM, we have developed a challenging H.R. Bocce playing surface with Seashore Paspalum, fine tuned by top dressing with lots of dune sand. Our court has a main playing surface cut to the level of a tee box with aprons of both short (2 inch) and taller (4-6 inch) grass. Trees are part of the playing area and contribute to the variety of rolls that can be developed in a relatively small area. Many times the close cut grass is the targeting surface used to reach the pallino nestled in the taller grass of the apron.

A fine turf based Bocce playing surface can serve as a focal point for outdoor restaurants and bars. Landscape architects can view a H.R. Bocce facility as a new recreational feature that can be located close to resort buildings and can offer a nighttime activity as well. The H.R. Bocce facility can be incorporated into most existing landscapes by providing a consistent rolling surface, a set of balls and a description of the game.

Many banks, commercial headquarters and municipal buildings feature large areas of turf grass with little to no activity encouraged or imagined. H.R. Bocce can make these areas a safe and dynamic playing surface for departmental tournaments, lunch break fellowship or charitable events. The prospect of turning a neglected area behind a warehouse or classroom into a H.R. Bocce playing surface can provide a focal point for a group work activity to clean up the site and make it a source of pride and sportsmanship.

The best way to learn about H.R. Bocce is to come to Manoa and play a quick game during lunch or late afternoon. We welcome any individuals interested in developing a H.R. Bocce facility to call Dr. Joe DeFrank (808-956-5698) or email (defrenk@hawaii.edu) him to schedule a playing time. If you have a site that you think is ready for play, drop him a line. He can bring his balls and his pals and then “LET THE GAMES BEGIN”.

Bocce Web sites

1. HickokSports.com, at <http://www.hickoksports.com/history/bocce.shtml> (viewed 04/14/01).
2. The Web’s Best Bocce Links Page, at <http://home.netcom.com/~mifisher/bocce.html> (viewed 04/14/01).
3. UNITED STATES BOCCE FEDERATION - <http://www.bocce.com/> (viewed 04/14/01).
4. THE WORLD BOCCE ASSOCIATION, at <http://www.worldbocce.org/> (viewed 04/14/01).
5. Hawaiian Rules Bocce – a new look at an ancient game at:
http://www2.hawaii.edu/~defrenk/non_homepage_pages/Narrated_powerpoint_slide_shows.htm. (narrated Power Point, viewed 11/05/03)
6. Hawaiian Rules Bocce – a narrated movie with lots of action at:
http://www2.hawaii.edu/~defrenk/non_homepage_pages/Narrated_powerpoint_slide_shows.htm (viewed 11/05/03)

Images of H.R. Bocce

A player releases a ball at the H.R. Bocce facility at the UHM Magoon Greenhouses in Manoa Valley. Trees are part of the playing surface adding obstacles to play. This area was an old banana patch and soil dump area before conversion to turf maintenance training area.



The Pohaku sets the center of a 1-meter release circle. The release circle confines the player's movements to establish a specific line of play and requires all players to shoot from the same area of the court. The Pohaku is a retractable tape measure that is used to settle scoring questions.

H.R. Bocce scoring is similar to traditional Bocce. Only one team scores per frame. Here, green scores 2 points and rolls first in the next frame. Red is next closest, no points and rolls second followed by blue and then yellow.

