

# Put away those golf sticks — bocce becoming popular in area

By KEN VOYLES

Looking for a new and different sport to try this summer? Put aside the golf clubs and tennis rackets for a moment and pick up a set of bocce balls.

Bocce (which means "kiss" in English) is an ancient sport that has become a modern, competitive game. John Del Signore and three friends from Livonia recently proved that the game is very much alive by winning the Italian-American Club of Dearborn's Bocce Tournament.

Del Signore along with Orlando Troiani, Angelo D'Orazio and Nazareno Troiani took first and second place prizes at the competitions which were conducted over a week's time.

The sport of bocce, as played by many people in this country, originated in Italy hundreds of years ago and has since become immensely popular.

Bocce, by rule, is played on a 90-by-12 foot court. However, the game can also be played just about anywhere, from a backyard to a sandy beach.

There are eight balls used by the competing players. Four are brown and four are red. There is also a small white ball called a "pallino."

The game is started when the pallino is thrown down the court. The object of the game is to pitch the bocce as close as possible to the pallino.

The sport can be played by singles or teams of up to four on a side.

A team receives one point for each ball that lays closest to the pallino.

Each of the four closest balls during a round scores one point. It's possible to tally four points by throwing all four balls closer to the pallino than any of the opponents.

The game is played from 12 to 18 points, depending on the number of players.

"I love the sport myself," said Del Signore. "Bocce is a very popular game in Italy. You could call it the national sport. In America, it is played all over but not quite the same way as in Italy."

Del Signore is the owner of Fonto D'Amore restaurant in Livonia and is also on the board of directors of the Italian American Club of Livonia.

"The Dearborn Club called me one day and asked if I would like to put together a team and play in their tournament," Del Signore said. "I got hold of my friends and we played as two teams. I was a little worried at first because I hadn't played competitively for awhile."

The tournament, which was double elimination, involved 25 men's teams and 25 women's teams.

Del Signore was teamed with Orlando Troiani. The pair won six straight games and reached the finals against their friends Angelo D'Orazio and Nazareno Troiani and lost, 18-16, in a close contest.

"There are a lot of ways you can play the game. It varies a lot and that makes it interesting. I've been playing ever since I can remember when I was

a kid in Italy," Signore said.

"There are two ways of throwing the bocce to score points. You can roll them or throw them through the air toward the pallino. The best way is through the air but that's also tougher," he continued.

Signore, an 18-year resident of Livonia, added that when playing on a court the players can use the walls and bounce the bocce toward the pallino.

"I remember in Italy we used to play for wine and other things. It's a very relaxed and easygoing sport for everybody," Signore said.

Another illusion about the sport is that it's mainly for just Italians. "That's not true. There were a lot of American players at the tournament not of Italian descent and they played very well," Signore said.

The game is not as lengthy as many sports, taking anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours to play, depending on the skill of the players.

As for popularity in Livonia, Signore said the city is fairly new and that bocce is just starting to get popular around the backyards and in the parks.

"The east side of Detroit and Windsor have strong ties with the game. It's not an Italian game and people are starting to find out more about it," he said.

Livonia, in fact, has one regulation

bocce court at Rotary Park on Six Mile.

"We would like to see more courts in Livonia. The best way to play is on a court but it's a lot of fun anywhere. It's also good exercise," said Del Signore.

The game is fairly inexpensive with a set of bocce running no more than \$50. Del Signore also compared the game to horseshoes and bowling but added that to be good a player must "must have the right feel for the game."

Probably the nicest element to bocce is that it's a very good summer sport.

"Oh yes, summer is the best time of year. We get into a lot of friendly games and have a lot of fun," Signore said.

The Italian-American Club of Livonia is also at the starting point of organizing its own bocce tournament later this month or early fall.

"We think it would be great to get a lot of people involved from around here. More people would get a chance to see what the game is like," Signore said.

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