



Special Olympics
South Dakota
Bocce Handbook
January 1, 2026



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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 sport at <https://www.specialolympics.org/what-we-do/sports/sports-offered?locale=en>



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SOSD EVENTS OFFERED

Traditional Doubles

Unified Doubles

MATP Doubles

BOCCE RULES FOR COMPETITION

The International Federation of Bocce is Special Olympics Inc. and therefore the Official Special Olympics Sports Rules for Bocce shall govern all Special Olympics competitions.

Refer to Article 1, <https://resources.specialolympics.org/sports-essentials/sports-and-coaching/sport-rules-article-1>, for more information pertaining to Codes of Conduct, Training Standards, Medical and Safety Requirements, Divisioning, Awards, Criteria for advancement to higher levels of competition and unified sports.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Uniforms and Shoes

- Team uniforms are required at both area and state competition
- Close-toed shoes are required. No sandals/flip flops or open-toed shoes allowed
- No shoes are allowed that would damage the bocce court surface

Eligibility and Participation Guidelines

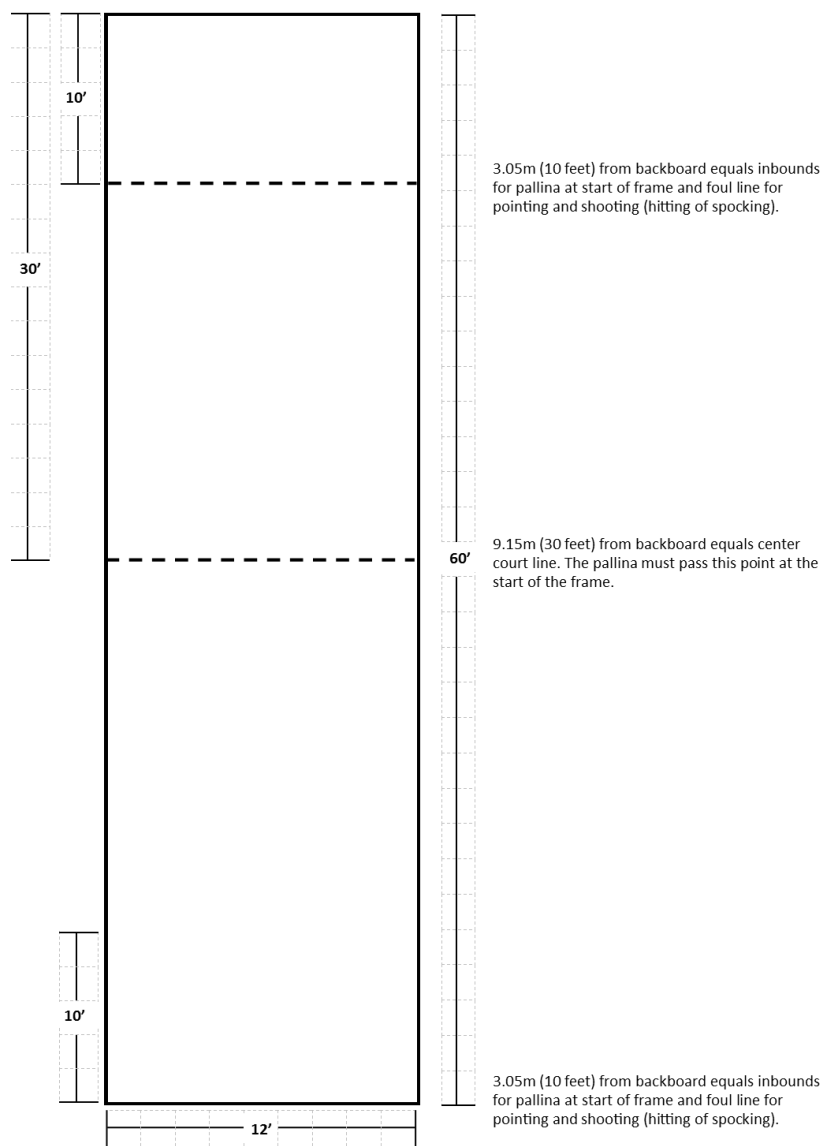
- Athletes and Unified Partners 8 years and older are allowed to participate
- AREA participation is a requirement to be eligible for state competition.

COURT AND EQUIPMENT

Court requirements

- Measures 12 feet (3.66 M) by 60 feet (18.29 M)
- The court surface may be composed of stone dust, dirt, clay, grass or artificial surface, providing 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 court walls are the side and end walls of the court and may be composed of any rigid material and at a minimum be as high as the bocce balls with the exception of when using portable strap courts. The side and end walls may be utilized during play for bank shots and rebound shots.
- Lines that are 2 inches wide should be marked on all courts for the following:
 - Foul line for pointing and shooting - 10 feet (3.05 M) from the backboards on both ends of the court.
 - Half court marker – 30 feet (9.15 M) from backboards. This is the minimum distance the pallina is played at the start of the frame. 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 before the half court line or the frame is considered dead.
 - The foul lines and the half court line should be drawn from sideboard to sideboard.



Equipment

- Bocce balls may be manufactured of wood or a composition material and must be of equal size.
- Official tournament ball sizes may be from 107 mm (4.20 inches) to 110 mm (4.33 inches) in diameter. 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 must not be larger than 63mm (2.5 inches) or smaller than 48 mm (1.875 inches) in diameter and should be of a color visibly distinct from both teams' bocce ball colors.
- A measuring device may be any device that has the capacity to accurately measure the distance between two objects, and is acceptable to tournament officials. For divisioning purposes, a retractable steel tape graduated in millimeters should be used.

RULES FOR COMPETITION

MATP Bocce Rules:

- MATP stands for Motor Activity Training Program
- Definition: For the athlete who needs assistance picking up the ball, entering/exiting the court or physical assistance from another person to stand.
- Athletes are allowed to have a coach or chaperone assist them as needed to fully participate.
- No athlete will be disqualified.
- All athletes entered in MATP Bocce will receive a 1st place ribbon or medal.
- Event offered: MATP Doubles

The Game

- The length of game: 30 min or 1st team to 12. **Tournament Modification: 20 mins/1st to 12.**
- There are four balls to a side or team, and generally made in two colors.
- A coin toss by a 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 (9.15 m) and before the 10 foot line (15.24 m) 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 40-foot mark (between center line and opposite 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 may only be rolled by a member of the team having won the coin toss to start the game. The player rolling 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 call 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 rolls 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 player has the option of rolling or banking 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.
 - SOSD staff or the event manager/tournament director shall have the discretion to allow certain modifications/interpretations of the 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/traditional doubles, each player will play two balls. The sequence of players does not matter. (NOTE: In SD, we play doubles only.)
- **Forfeiture** – Teams (doubles) with one or both players absent at game time will be given a 5-minute grace period with no penalty. If after 5 minutes they are still absent (one or both players) the game will be considered a forfeit. The court will still be reserved for those players who are present to “play for fun” for up to 30 minutes. NOTE: We follow a rolling schedule after the first games for bocce so please make sure that you are at your court 30 minutes prior to your scheduled time to play (in case the games are ahead of schedule).

Coaching (rules during play)

- Strategy discussions with any athlete and/or partner by the coach are prohibited once the match begins. Athletes/unified partners may discuss strategy with each other outside the court during the match but once one of them enters the court, no further strategy discussions, “coaching”, are allowed.
- If an official determines that a coach/partner/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.
- At the end of the frame, the referee announces the winning points and color to the players outside the court at the pallina end and before the balls are removed, the referee should look to the players for agreement.
- The players (not coaches or spectators) have a right to request a measurement if the players disagree with the referee.
 - Measurements are taken from the center side of the bocce ball to the center side of the pallina.
- The scoring team for each frame will also win the pallina advantage for the subsequent frame.
- **Ties during frame** – In the event that two opposing balls are equidistant from the pallina (tied), the team that rolled last will continue to roll until the tie is broken. Example: Team A rolls a ball toward the pallina and establishes the point. Then Team B rolls its ball toward the pallina, and the referee determines that they are both exactly the same distance from the pallina. Team B must continue

to roll until it has a point closer than Team A's ball. If Team B does roll up to the point, and Team A hits that ball out re-establishing a tie, Team A must continue to roll until the tie is broken.

- **Ties at the end of a frame** – In the event that the two balls closest to the pallina belong to opposing teams and are tied, no points will be awarded. The pallina returns to the team that last delivered it. Play resumes from the end of the court from which the frame was last played.
- **Winning score** – Two-player team (two balls per player): either the first team to score 12 points or the team that is ahead after 30 minutes.

Tie Breaker Criteria (for division standings and awards)

- Win-loss record
- Head-to-head competition
- Point differential (total points scored – opponent total points scored)
- Coin Flip

PENALTIES

- Enforcement of penalties – Immediately upon determination by the official that a foul has been committed, the official will notify both teams and inform them of the penalty imposed. The team fouled against has the option to decline any penalty imposed by the official and accept the lie of the ball(s) and continues playing. The ruling of the official is final.
- **Specific fouls**
 - **Foul-line fouls** – In both pointing and hitting, any part of the player's body, including the player's foot, or any apparatus used by an athlete such as a wheelchair, crutches, cane, ramp, etc, must not be in contact with any part of the foul line (or over the foul line) until the ball is released, delivering the pallina, and before the ball touches any part of the playing field in front of the specific foul line. The penalty for a player/team committing this foul will be to declare the specific ball dead. The referee will stop the ball just delivered before it reaches the pallina and other balls "in contention" and remove it. If the just delivered ball comes into contact with the pallina and/or other balls "in contention" and they are moved from their original position, then the referee will place those balls back as close to their original position as close as possible, remove the just delivered ball and play continues.
 - **Player plays more than his/her allotted number of balls** – The ball in question is declared dead. The referee will stop the ball just delivered before it reaches the pallina and other balls "in contention" and remove it. If the just delivered ball comes into contact with the pallina and/or other balls "in contention" and they are moved from their original position, then the referee will place those balls back as close to their original position as possible, remove the just delivered ball and play continues. This condition will exist when a player on a two-person team plays three balls instead of two. The remaining player on a two-player team will only have one ball to play.
 - **Illegal movement of a ball belonging to your own team** – If a player moves one or more of his/her team's balls, the balls are removed from the court and considered dead, and play continues.

- **Illegal movement of an opponent's ball** – If, after all eight balls have been thrown, a player moves one or more of his/her opponent's balls, the opponent's balls that were moved will be awarded one point each. If a player moves one or more of his/her opponent's balls, and there are remaining unplayed balls, the referee will place the balls as close to their original position as possible and play continues.
- **Illegal movement of the pallina by a player** – If the pallina is moved by a player, the opposite team will be awarded as many points as the number of live balls that were “in contention” plus the number of ball yet unplayed. If the team fouled against has no balls “in contention” and no balls remaining, then the frame will be declared dead by the referee and started over at the same end.
- **Pallina knocked out of bounds**
 - If the pallina is knocked out of the field of play, the frame is replayed beginning at the opposite end, with the same team throwing the pallina as the previous frame.
- **Accidental or premature movement of balls and pallina by a referee**
 - **Accidental movement of a ball or pallina during play** (when more balls are yet to be played) – The frame is considered dead and started over from the same end.
 - **Accidental movement of a ball or pallina after all balls have been played** – If the point or points were obvious to the referee, the points will be awarded. All uncertain points will not be awarded and the frame is considered dead and started over at the same end.
- **Interference with a ball in motion**
 - **By one's own team** – When a player interferes with his/her team's ball in motion, the referee must declare the ball just delivered dead. The referee should seek to stop the ball before it reaches the pallina and other balls “in contention” and remove it. If the just released ball does come in contact with the pallina or other balls “in contention”, the referee should place the balls/pallina back as close as possible to their original position and play continues.
 - **By opponent's team** – If a player interferes with an opponent's ball in motion, the team fouled against has one of the following options:
 - ✓ Play the ball over
 - ✓ Declare the frame dead
 - ✓ Decline the penalty, accept the lie of the touched ball(s) and continues playing.
 - **With no disruption of position** – If a spectator, animal or object interferes with a ball in motion and that ball does not touch another ball in play, it must be played over by the same player.
 - **With disruption of position** – If a spectator, animal or object interferes with a ball in motion and that ball touches another ball already in play and “in contention” the frame is dead.
 - **Other disruption of play** – Any action which interferes with the position of pallina or the ball of each team closest to the pallina renders the frame dead. If balls other than the pallina or the two opposing balls closest to it are moved, they may be replaced as close as possible to their original position by the two captains and referee.

- **Wrong color delivery**
 - **Replaceable** - If a player delivers the wrong color ball, the ball may not be stopped by another player or the referee. The ball must be allowed to come to rest and replaced by the proper colored ball by the referee.
 - **Not replaceable** – If a player delivers a wrong color ball which cannot be replaced without disturbing another ball already in play the frame is declared dead and replayed from the same end.
- **Wrong rotation of play**
 - **Initial point** – If a team wrongly delivers the pallina and its first ball, the referee will return the pallina and the first ball which was played out of rotation. The referee will then ask the other color player or team to deliver the pallina when restarting the frame from the same end of the court.
 - **Subsequent rolls of the proper color in an incorrect sequence** – If a player delivers his/her ball when his/her team is “in” and the other team has balls left, the ball in question should, if possible and safe, be stopped by the referee before it reaches the balls “in contention”, be declared dead and removed from the court. If it reaches the balls “in contention”, the referee should replace the pallina and nearest balls to where they were before the out of rotation delivery took place.
- **Other circumstances**
 - **Broken ball** – if a ball or pallina should break, the frame is considered dead. Replacement of the ball or pallina is the responsibility of the Tournament Director.
 - **Court grooming** – All courts should be groomed prior to the tournament. Courts may not be reconditioned during the course of the game. Obstacles or objects such as stones, cups, etc., may be removed during the course of the game.
 - **Moving ball or pallina** – No player may play his/her ball until the pallina or another ball has come to a complete rest.
 - **Mechanical aid** – if due to a medical or physical condition an athlete requires the use of a mechanical aid to spot the position of the pallina, then discretion can be given to the Event Manager/Tournament director for this to be permitted. Any mechanical aid such as a cone or marker should be placed behind the pallina and be
 - removed once the ball is released from the athlete’s hand. If a bell is used it should be rung while held over the pallina.
- **Player behavior**
 - Whenever possible, a player should move off the court when an opponent is playing.
 - Sportsmanship – players shall act in a sportsmanlike manner at all times.
 - Any act that is deemed as poor sportsmanship, such as insulting language, gestures, actions or words which provoke ill will, if flagrant, may result in disqualification.
 - Attire – it is recommended that all athletes wear close toed shoes and dress in an appropriate and respectful manner.
- **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.
 - ✓ Respect your opponents at all times.

DEFINITION OF PLAYING TERMS

- **Live ball** – any ball in play that has been delivered.
- **Dead ball** – any ball that has been disqualified or forfeited. A ball may be disqualified if:
 - ✓ It is the result of a penalty.
 - ✓ It has gone out of the court.
 - ✓ It has come in contact with a person or object which is out of the court.
 - ✓ It hits the top of the court boards.
 - ✓ It hits the covering over the courts or supports thereof.
 - ✓ It is the result of a foot foul.
 - ✓ It is the result of an illegal movement of your team's ball.
 - ✓ It is the result of interference with a ball in motion by one's own team.
- **Bocce ball and Pallina**
 - ✓ The pallina is a small object ball sometimes called a cue ball, beebee, etc.
 - ✓ The bocce ball is the larger playing ball.
- **Hitting** – sometimes known as shooting. Hitting is the action of rolling a ball which is thrown with sufficient velocity that it would hit the backboard if it missed the target.
- **Bank or rebound shot** refers to playing a ball off either the sideboards or backboard.
- **Pointing** – is the action of rolling a ball to obtain a point close to the pallina.
- **Frame** – is the period in a game in which the balls are played from one side of the court to the other and points are awarded.
- **"In contention"**. Refers to balls that an official would deem to be balls that he/she will potentially need to measure or award as scoring balls.
- **Foul** – A rule infraction for which a penalty is prescribed.

DIVISIONING

- Coaches need to complete assessment scores for each athlete and unified partner. These bocce skills assessment scores (BOSAT) are used in divisioning.
- **Athletes/unified partners can toss a minimum of 4 balls or maximum of 8 balls at each of the 3 distances to gather BOSAT scores. Only the 3 best scores at each distance are measured and used for BOSAT scores.**
- **All measurements should be recorded in centimeters.**
- 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 BOSAT score. **Round to nearest centimeter**
- During the assessment process, if the pallina is moved from its spot at 30 feet, 40 feet and 50 feet, it is to be replaced on the spot before the next ball is rolled and before any measurements are taken.
- Refer to page 12 for assessment court set up, BOSAT worksheet and further directions

AWARDS

- AREA Competition
 - ✓ Participation ribbons are presented to all participants
- STATE Competition: Awards are presented after the completion of each division.
 - ✓ Medals are presented to teams placing 1st-3rd in each division.
 - ✓ Ribbons are presented to teams placing 4th-8th in each division.
 - ✓ MATP divisions will all receive gold medals.

BOSAT SCORES ARE MEASURED IN CENTIMETERS. Please round scores to the nearest centimeter when submitting registrations.

BOCCE SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST (BOSAT) WORKSHEET

Do not submit this form with your registration. This is an information gathering tool for you only. This information is required, however, on your State Bocce Registration Form 2.

TEAM MEMBERS		TRIALS						Sum of 9 Throws	Team Total
		1 30 ft.		2 40 ft.		3 50 ft.			
1	A								
	A/U								
2	A								
	A/U								
3	A								
	A/U								
4	A								
	A/U								
5	A								
	A/U								
6	A								
	A/U								
7	A								
	A/U								
8	A								
	A/U								

RULES

Each athlete should play three modified games, called a set. The athlete should alternate from each end of the court and play the following allotted balls. The athlete should not surpass the foul line when he/she plays the allotted balls:

Place the pallina at the 30 ft. line, and the player should play eight balls. The closest 3 balls will be measured and recorded.

Place the pallina at the 40 ft. line, and the player should play eight balls. The closest 3 balls will be measured and recorded.

Place the pallina at the 50 ft. line, and the player should play eight balls. The closest 3 balls will be measured and recorded.

The sum of the athletes and the unified partners scores shall be their doubles team score.

BOSAT SCORES ARE MEASURED IN CENTIMETERS. Please round scores to the nearest centimeter when submitting registrations.