

Boccie ready for Olympics, but not for bimbos

Boccie, anyone?

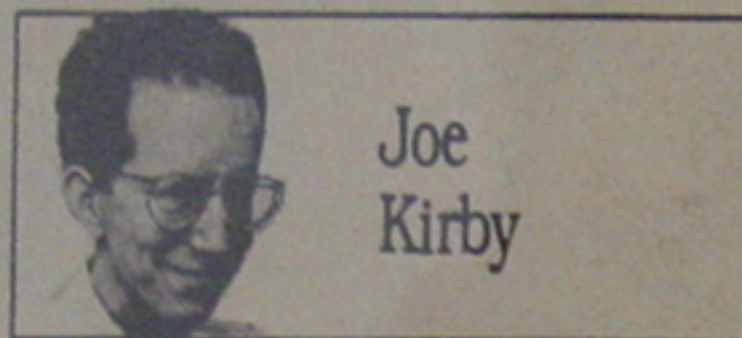
Forget tennis, volleyball, croquet or badminton. If you want to do something in your backyard other than mow the lawn, try laying out a boccie court.

What is boccie? Good question.

Boccie (pronounced bah-chee) is a type of lawn bowling popular in Mediterranean countries and is believed to be pre-historic in origin. That makes it older than Georgia football, which only dates back to Vince Dooley.

Boccie features teams of two or four players lobbing or rolling hard balls back and forth at a smaller ball, called a palino. The object is to get your boccie balls closer to the palino than your opponents can. Believe me: It sounds a lot easier than it looks. You might say it's like playing horseshoes with shotputs, although the boccie balls don't weigh quite that much.

You can play boccie on any level stretch of ground. I played the other evening on what is probably the Yankee Stadium of boccie courts, at least as far as Cobb County and metro Atlanta go — that of Marietta lawyer Matt Flournoy



Joe Kirby

and his wife, Joanne. The backyard of their Arden Drive home in west Marietta features a cinderized boccie court (a surface similar to a high school track) surrounded by benches, sidewalks and attractive landscaping. The court also is lighted for boccie after dark.

Alongside the court is a scoreboard, labled "Court of Boccie, Judge Matt Flournoy presiding. No appeals." Rather than "home" and "visitors," the teams are labled "plaintiffs" and "defendants."

You might say that Flournoy, the son of Cobb Superior Court Judge Bob Flournoy, spends his days in court and his nights on court.

The Flournoys recently hosted a "men's night out." Just about all of those

on hand turned out to be lawyers or judges, except myself, so I decided Matt had invited a token journalist to elevate the gathering. Many of us no doubt were hoping for entertainment along the lines of that provided five Georgia legislators on their notorious lobbyist-paid junket to Daufuskie Island, S.C. But alas, we were plied with boccie, not bimbos.

Yet not even the 95-degree heat was able to detract from the odd enjoyment of rolling balls back and forth, walking after them, picking them up and rolling them back again. It was like bowling at an alley where you had to retrieve your ball and roll it back toward the sitting area. And all the while, the amplified strains of Italian opera were blasting out of a portable CD player.

"Oh my Lord!" bemoaned state Rep. Roy Barnes of blue-collar Mableton in mock-horror as he arrived. "Those folks in Mableton would kill me if they knew I was playing boccie and listening to opera!"

Don't worry, Roy. Just tell 'em you were playing horseshoes with shotputs while listening to the Grand Ol' Opry.

At one point, Flournoy needed an impartial assistant to help measure the distances between several balls, so he asked yours truly to help out. I was flattered that anyone would trust a journalist to be impartial and give an honest opinion. Then I remembered that just about everyone else there was a lawyer, so I guess I was picked by default.

If I were giving out trophies based on play that night, the award for Most Powerful Boccier would go to Cobb Solicitor Ben Smith Jr., who apparently spent his younger days on the Pro Bowling Tour. The Best Style trophy would go to Joanne Flournoy, who was a study in concentration and poise. And the trophy for Most Cagey Boccier would go to lawyer Bill Gentry, Flournoy's law partner. If his courtroom strategizing is as shrewd as his boccie tactics, he'll wind up on the Supreme Court someday.

Is there an Olympic boccie team yet? If there is, I want to be on it.

Joe Kirby is editorial page editor of the *Marietta Daily Journal*.