

60 seconds is a long time in Pétanque.

There's always plenty of discussion about how long people take to play but until now apart from a feeling everyone else takes much longer than you there's no evidence to back up these assertions. But it's one of the most annoying things about playing the game. The frustration with a player who appears to be a slow player is not because they take over 60 seconds (because the evidence - see later - says they rarely do) but because they are significantly more than the natural rhythm of the game. Players taking under 20 seconds have a low tolerance of players taking over 30 seconds and are almost apoplectic about anyone taking 50 seconds. Just as a player throwing 3 boules in 10 seconds as a novice is obviously too fast someone at the other extreme of the timespan attracts the same intolerance.

So today I decided to get some evidence. It was a cup final match at a local club and I sampled three games. I did 9 ends in total and I recorded the times between the ball landing and the next ball landing and recorded it on my smartphone which had a timer with a lap function. When it looked into the data in real time the key thing was that very few people took longer than the allotted time with most of them taking under 20 seconds. In fact out of 108 throws only on 3 occasions did anyone exceed the time allowed. The average end took just under 5 minutes whereas if every player had taken 60 seconds to throw the boule it would've been obviously 12 minutes so players are playing much faster than the maximum permitted time.

Unfortunately my smart phone did not allow me to export the data to a spreadsheet so I thought a bit more and realised you need a bit more organisation and an extra pair of hands and a data entry sheet and you can do some serious analysis. The data entry sheet is below. You can print several of these on an A4 sheet and armed with a stopwatch or a smart phone and a pen you and a friend can record an entire game.

One person has to be the scribe and record the data as it is collected and spoken by the timekeeper. As teams may play many boules consecutively and players may not you have to have the ability to record that. The column headed Player is where you can record name or initials of the player and the Notes column allows you to add whether a measure or any other issue extended the time over 60 seconds.

Put the data into a spreadsheet (or ask for my file). Formulas do some basic calculations.

End No.				
	Team A	Player	Team B	Notes
Boule 1				
Boule 2				
Boule 3				
Boule 4				
Boule 5				
Boule 6				
Boule 7				
Boule 8				
Boule 9				
Boule 10				
Boule 11				
Boule 12				
Total				
Total Mins				
End duration			Minutes	
Average			Minutes	

So it's something that you should do on a training day or a normal club session. Arrange for a group of players to play as normal except they'll be recorded on the day and data will be analysed and fed back to them. This will tell you that some players don't take enough time to think but some players are taking too much. You should be able to coach your players to measure time better and know if they're in danger of running over the time. By doing some analysis on your playing style and timings you're prepared better to combat the tactics of these "slow" players.

It won't stop the players who deliberately take 120 seconds and exceed the limit knowing it will knock normal rhythm players off their game. But your players may be better informed and better able to resist these rulebreakers.

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