



Correction

Al D'Elia is president of the Stamford Bocce League. To learn more about the league, call him at 323-1455, or Dom Corbo at 912-9633. D'Elia's name was misspelled in a community page story in The Sunday Advocate.

Steve Daniel/For The Advocate

The roll of the bocce ball

Stamford tradition thrives at Scalzi Park

By Gina Lombardi
Special Correspondent

It starts with a roll of the pallino, and the game begins.

For almost five decades, the Stamford Bocce League has organized tournament play on the lighted courts near the entrance to Scalzi Park, enjoying the evening air and the spirit of the Italian-born game.

Bocce has been a longtime tradition in Stamford, which has a large Italian-American community.

"From bankers to butchers, we've got a lot of people coming down here," said Al DiLea, president of the league.

DiLea arrived before the games last Tuesday to water down the stone-dust courts and see that they are "brushed."

This year, there are 14 teams in the men's division. Each team has a name ranging from traditional Italian designations, such as Societe Figli DiRose, the Minturnese Social Club and Ischia, to the colorful, such as the Ball Busters and Benny's Blue Birds.

There are also names of team sponsors, such as Taranto's Restaurant, Continental Manor and Russo Plumbing.

Each team has six or seven members who rotate in and out of games.

The games begin at 8 p.m., promptly. If a team doesn't show on time, it risks forfeiting, which explains the last-minute rush to get to the court by some teams.

Stamford's bocce season lasts for 14 weeks, starting the first Monday in May. Men's teams play on either Monday or Tuesday night.

At the end of the season, elimination rounds will lead to a tournament between the best Monday team and the best Tuesday team. They will celebrate with a banquet.

Next year, the league will celebrate the 50th anniversary of bocce at Scalzi. A brass plaque embedded in a large granite rock by the courts marks the names of the league's founders and contributing members.

The league was founded in 1951 by Theodore Coppola, Michael Catino, Nicholas Carlucci and Emanuele "Mannie" Terenzio.

"Bocce has a long history," said Terenzio, the league's first treasurer. Bocce has been around since the Roman Empire.

"I started 10 or 12 years ago, and I got to enjoy it. It's a good time," DiLea said.

"Your game changes, of course. For example, the police were horrible last year, and they've come a long way."

Police Officer Nicholas Braccia, captain of the Stamford police team, said that the team had nowhere to go but up.

"We had to improve, we had so bad a beginning," he said.

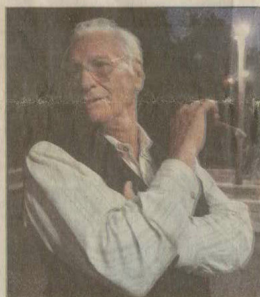
Sgt. Philip Mazzucco is in his second year of league play.

"We come down Wednesdays and play pick-up games for practice," he said. "We're not playing for millions of dollars here. This is all in fun."

Braccia remembers watching, as a child, his grandfather and grandfather's friends play bocce in an alley.

"When I was little, at my grandpa's on Sunday, they played on Halloween Boulevard and Jefferson Street in Stamford, all the old Italians," said Braccia. "This is the game of my ancestors."

The game is played two teams to a court.



Emanuele Terenzio was one of the people who first brought the Italian tradition to the playing fields in Stamford.

Each team has four players, half of them standing on one end of the court and half on the other.

There are three games in a match.

Each game is won by scoring 16 points. Points are decided by how close a player can roll the bocce ball next to the smaller target ball, or pallino.

Scoring can be tricky. When the distance between opposing balls and the pallino cannot be determined by eye, it's time to grab the tape measure.

In a game between Lou's Kitchen and the police team, the green and the red ball formed an almost perfect triangle in relation to the pallino. The Lou's Kitchen team is named after the luncheonette in New Canaan, the family business of father-and-son players Lou and Eugene Molgano.

Bocce incorporates some of the techniques of pool, including making bank shots off the wooden sides of the 64-foot-long courts.

Braccia used this technique to roll his ball to a slow stop, just touching the pallino.

"Oh, wow, I'm hot," he said. "I couldn't do that again if I tried."

The game is not only for men. The women's league plays on Thursday nights.

"They are hot this year," DiLea said.

A women's league has been active for almost 17 years.

Patricia Franco, president of the Women's Bocce League in Stamford, is traveling to Reno, Nev., this week to compete in national bocce tournaments with players from Stamford.

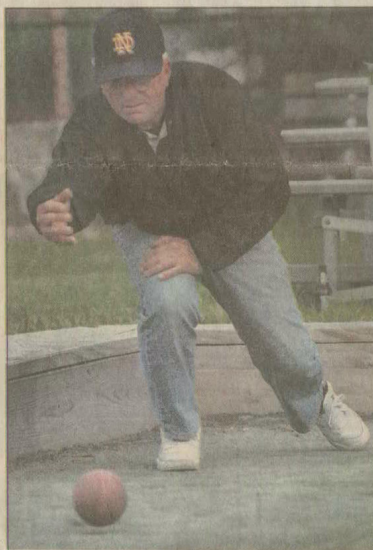
"There's over 95,000 ladies competing in the national tournament," Franco said.

Players range in age from 16 to 85, she said.

"The only difference between the men's and women's league is that we wear red shirts with our sponsors' names on the back, but we have the same rules of play and conduct as they do," Franco said.

For men and women alike, it's the camaraderie that keeps bringing them back every week.

"I look forward to coming down," DiLea said. "I've met a lot of nice people."



Frank Francis tosses a bocce ball down the lane. The object of the toss is to get your ball as close to the pallino (the smallest ball) as possible.



Frank Melchionne, left, and Ed Czeslik use a tape measure to check the distance of the ball from the pallino.