

## Bullets

A long-forgotten, ancient game played throughout Renfrewshire as early as the seventeenth century was the game of bullets. Two opposing teams each had an iron ball with a maximum weight of two pounds. The object of the game was to throw this 'bullet' in as few shots as possible over a measured distance. The 'bullet' was thrown **underhand** and allowed to roll after it fell to the ground. A second ran ahead advising the player where to aim his 'bullet'. The game seems to have included elements of bowling, curling and golf – games which later became popular in the county.

Bullets was a highly dangerous game, especially as it was played along public roads. A Lochwinnoch bulleteer named Ramsey met his death playing bullets in 1683. However, despite the danger, this traditional sport continued in Renfrewshire until the mid-nineteenth century. In 1902 some older residents in Kilbarchan remembered bullet matches being played in their youth.

What was possibly the last bulleting match in Renfrewshire took place in 1846 on the Beith Road in Johnstone, from where the four roads met at Damside Cottage (the old toll cottage, at what is now the mini-roundabout) towards Quarrelton. Soon after this match, early health and safety considerations prevailed and the traditional game of bullets was banned. A game similar to bullets, but known as Kyles, was also played in Fife. © 2015 Helen Calcluth, Renfrewshire Local History Forum, <https://rlhf.info/the-game-of-bullets/>

[Armagh road bowling: The art of throwing 'bullets'](#)

## Rules

Players throw the steel ball (called a bullet or a bowl – pronounced more like howl) across a 4km/2.49miles course, he or she who needs the least number of throws to get to the end wins. This is the traditional course length but, you can decide on the length of course that suitable for your site and the number and age of those playing.

Wherever the bullet stops on the 'road', it is marked, and the next throw is taken from that mark. You can take a running start to the throw. Around tight curves, or corners where two roads meet, the bowl may be thrown through the air (lofted). If two players or teams approach the finish line with equal shots, the winner is decided by which finishing throw goes the longest distance past the finish line.

As the game is going on, players and spectators would shout *Faugh a Ballach!* It's an Irish battle cry which means "clear the way".

It may be an idea to have a golfing 'fore' equivalent, just in case a ball goes astray! Pas fada means "long pass" in gaelic (gahlick)

## Equipment Required

1. Petanque/bocce/boules/lawn bowling 'jack'. Alternatively, for younger children and the less dexterous, a football, basketball or other larger ball as long as it has some weight to it. For older children and those with better hand-to-eye coordination (and hopefully a better aim), a tennis ball would be ideal.
2. Course markers. You can keep it simple by going in straight lines, or be more adventurous by including bends but, you need to be able to clearly mark out the course with barrier tape, chalk, traffic cones, spray paint etc.
3. A large open space like the school playground or playing fields. Somewhere that, if a ball goes astray, it will not cause damage to property or belongings.

If working in teams, you could pick colours from the Semple clan tartan (below). If these colours are not readily available, use what you have.

