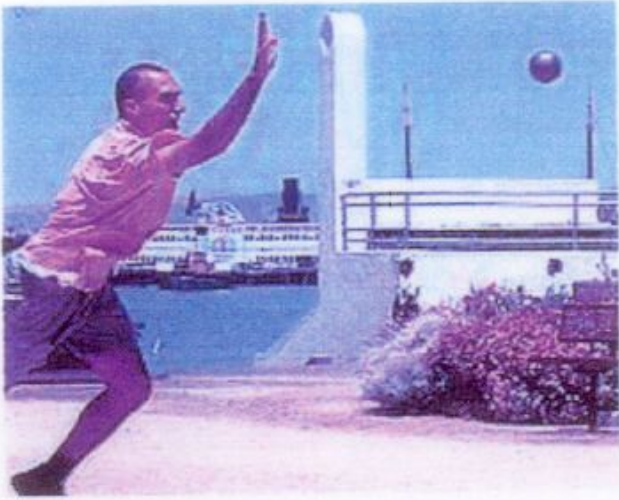


USF Staffer to Represent U.S. in Bocce Ball Championship



At 27, Ben Tosi will be the youngest representative to play for the U.S. bocce team at the international championships this October in Nice, France.

He may be a champion of the most obscure game in American sports, but there's no denying Ben Tosi '99, events manager at USF, has a future in bocce ball.

The ancient game played with brass balls rolled or thrown to either side of an elongated dirt court is known mostly in this country to the older Italian or French immigrants who play it. Tosi, however, is a native son who clearly harbors some European passion.

“I saw those beautiful brass balls and I just fell in love with the game,” he said. “I'm addicted.”

At 27, Tosi will be the youngest representative to play for the U.S. team at the international championships this October in Nice, France. Two of his five teammates are over 50. Tosi qualified for the team after winning a gold medal in volo, or precision shooting, at the national championships in Highwood, Ill. in June. Tosi's specialty is a more difficult version of the game that requires players to throw their balls and hit their opponents' balls away from the pallino, or target.

At a recent practice at his home court in San Francisco's Aquatic Park, Tosi made several pitches while his fellow club members played nearby, discussing their game in Italian. The average age of the club's core membership is 70-plus and some have represented San Francisco at national championships in the past. They said they are proud of their young player, who has put in some serious practice over the last two years.

“He can roll it and throw it with precision,” said Max Barone, a 76-year-old club member. “He's a perfect player.”

Tosi, who graduated with a bachelor's in business administration from USF in 1999, said he got interested in the game while working as a valet at a restaurant near the park. Soon he was a regular member of the club and was recently elected its secretary. When he decided to compete in the national championships this year (the competition is open to any national association member), he did not expect to bring home gold. Tosi was the only player to design a club logo and wear it on his jacket. Though he's considered a long shot for winning in Europe, where it's a serious sport, Tosi hopes that the game's popularity will grow in the U.S.

“(Bocce) is a whole underground world; in America, it's perceived as an old-man sport,” Tosi said. “I'm promoting it as much as I can in San Francisco. I'd like to organize a world championship here some day.”