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## Lamorinda Pétanque goes global

By Sophie Braccini



Noah in Marseilles Photos provided

Do you know pétanque? Fourteen-year-old Lafayette resident Noah Sonet does and he is representing Lamorinda at the pétanque world championship in Marseilles, France this summer.

The young member of the Lamorinda Pétanque club is one of three young Americans on the U.S. junior team. While his son Noah is competing in France, Gilbert Sonet will be featuring the local club in San Francisco on July 15 as part of the annual celebration of the French-American friendship that takes place (almost) on Bastille Day, which is July 14.

Who knew that the club that was founded in Lafayette and endowed with beautiful courts along Saint Mary's Road less than 10 years ago would grow to breed champions? Gilbert Sonet was instrumental from the start in the creation of the club. He is a native French businessman who has been working in the restaurant and retail industry for years and lives in Lafayette with

his family. His son Noah has been playing pétanque since he was 4 years old and quickly showed great talent. Two years ago he won the U.S. championship as part of a "triplet" - a team of three players of different ages, with his father and another Lamorinda player.

Pétanque is a rather simple game of small metal bowls (boules) that have to get as close as possible to a wooden target (cochonnet). It is part of the very ancient and wide family of games that involve rolling a ball toward a target; bocce in Italy and lawn bowling in England are part of the same group. This French version was born in Provence in the mid-19th century. There is a U.S. pétanque fédération that connects clubs all over the country, and 10 clubs are affiliated in northern California.

Gilbert Sonet insists that even if some players at the Lamorinda Pétanque club are very serious, the majority just play to have a fun family time and a picnic under the trees of Lafayette. He says that the majority of the members are English speakers, always ready to show the game to beginners on a Sunday afternoon and lend some bowls.

It is the same spirit of inclusion that drove Gilbert Sonet to say yes when he was contacted by Charles Ségalas to organize pétanque demonstrations and games at the San Francisco Bastille Day celebration. Ségalas is the president of an organization that connects all the French clubs in the Bay Area. There are some 30,000 French citizens in the Bay Area, and many more who have become Americans or have French parents.

Ségalas says that the July 15 party at Justin Herman Plaza at the Embarcadero has been revived by the French Consul in San Francisco, Emmanuel Lebrun-Damiens with the support of San Francisco mayor Ed Lee. The event will feature local French businesses, entertainment, food and libations. After 6 p.m. a dance party is organized on the plaza.

Gilbert Sonet and members of the Lamorinda pétanque will start playing and teaching the game starting at 11 a.m. until 6 p.m. He has already prepared the "boules," the Lamorinda banners, and his joyous energy along with his unmistakable French accent that will do wonders to get people to participate.

By the time the party ends, Gilbert Sonet should have the results of the world tournament and hope to be able to announce it. The event is free and opened to the public. More information is available at [www.bastilledaysf.org](http://www.bastilledaysf.org).



Noah Sonet shows his pétanque style in Lafayette.

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[back](#)

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