

## Andy Isakson's Petanque Highlights



In Andy's words:

I took the summer off in 2002 and spent some time at the beach where I had just completed construction of a family beach house. It was in the then small town of Seaside on the Gulf Coast in between Destin and Panama City.

While I was building my beach house, I got to be friends with some of the locals and was introduced to the game of Petanque. For a couple years, I got my brains beat in by the locals who played every day and were reluctant to pass on tips to the game to new players. But I was persistent.

That summer I got to be friends with a Frenchman named Laurant who owned the beach side jewelry shop. Laurant looked a lot like Fabio, with long hair and a lean build. Being French at the beach, he never wore a shirt and really hardly any clothes, he was colorful. We were probably an odd couple but we became friends.

I would play Petanque with Laurant every morning at 8:00 and every evening at 5:00. We had a diverse group that would show up to play. The game became quite popular. I never missed a game and by the end of the summer, I was pretty good, but not given much credit in the local pecking order.

We started having tournaments. When we did, I started winning and my stock rose in the Petanque community. We played at a pretty high level which playing every day will do. Bill, one of our regulars won the national singles title one year. Our group got interested in playing in the national tournaments. Laurant asked me to play as his partner and we entered the National Championship Tournament held in Miami Beach in 2004.

Laurant and I made it to the quarter finals, the last 8 teams, the last 16 players. So at my peak, I claimed a spot in the top 20 in the country that year, the highlight of my limited athletic resume. At the time when my game was on, I felt I could play with any American. The French however were in another higher league.

One thing I liked about Petanque was the longevity you have in the sport. In the world championships every year in the south of France, in the finals you will typically see a player in their 70's. I know I've missed my chance in many sports but with Petanque, I've still got time if I practice to work on my resume.