



MODULE L1M5

CROQUET STROKES



The stroke involving two (or more) balls placed in contact with each other is called a croquet stroke. By hitting only the striker's ball with the mallet, the player attempts to send both balls to specific positions on the lawn. In the module '*Shot sequences of Association Croquet*', the striker's ball and the croqueted balls are promoted to positions that will assist the player in subsequent shots of that turn.

Croquet Stroke Terminology

Take croquet: ("*takes croquet from...*") having roqueted a ball, the striker must then *take croquet* from the ball they roqueted.

Striker's ball: The player's own ball. This is the only ball that the striker's mallet is allowed to make contact with in any stroke.

Croqueted ball: The ball that the striker takes croquet from.

Croquet stroke: The striking period in which the striker hits only their striker's ball with the mallet face causing both balls in contact to move. (In a croquet stroke, the striker's ball and the croqueted ball must move)

Centre line: The imaginary line joining the centre of the two balls in contact is a *Centre Line*. Regardless of the *Line of Aim*, the croqueted ball will always travel along the centre line (Figure 5, Pull Effect).

Line of Aim (The direction that the mallet travels throughout the stroke) effects the direction of the striker's ball. The Line of Aim must be within 90° of the centre line to ensure the croquet ball moves in the stroke.

The wider the angle, the further the striker's ball will travel in relation to the croqueted ball (Figure 2, 'A' areas).

The closer the line of aim is to the centre line, the further the croqueted ball will travel in relation to the striker's ball. (Figure 2, 'B' areas)

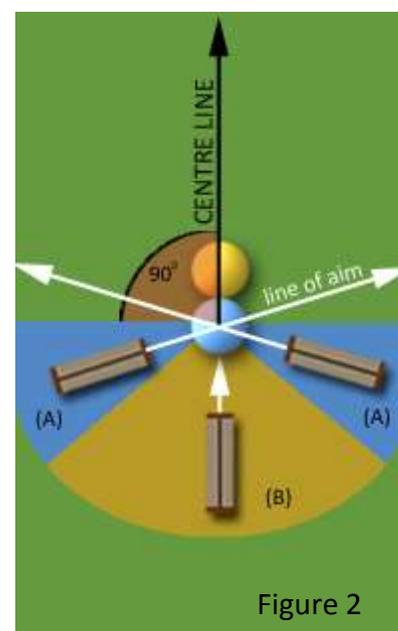
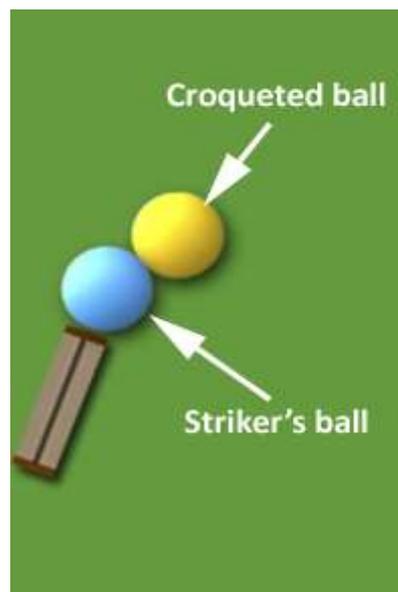


Figure 2

Fine Take-Offs.

- A croquet stroke in which the striker's ball travels a long distance in comparison to the croqueted ball. The striker's ball 'takes off' from the croqueted ball which is left behind, coming to rest close to where it was before the croquet stroke was taken.
- Both balls must move even if the croqueted ball only shakes. Should the croqueted ball not move, the turn ends and the balls are, in most cases, replaced in contact as they were before the stroke was made.
- Extra care needs to be taken to make sure that both balls are in contact before the stroke is made.
- In a fine take-off, the line of aim is almost at the widest angle possible (about 90°) from the *centre line*, so most of the energy remains with the striker's ball. Therefore the weight needed is basically the same as a single ball stroke.

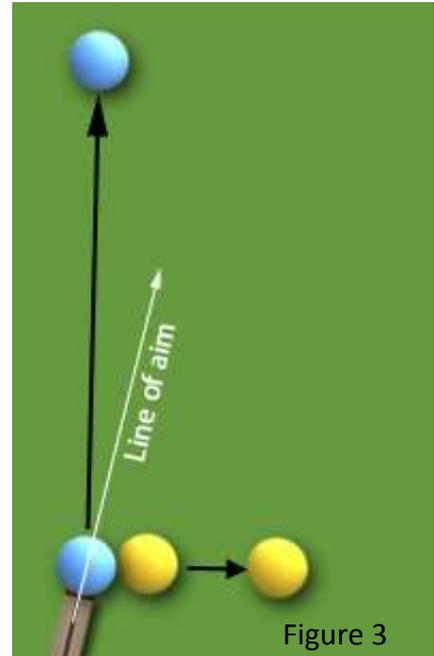


Figure 3

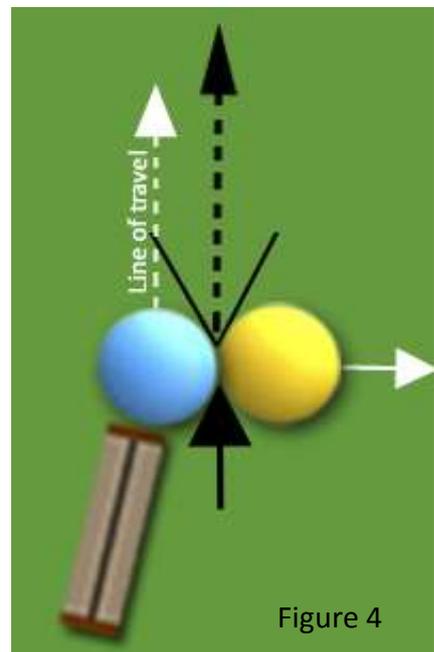


Figure 4

Placing the strikers ball

When the striker's ball is placed in contact with the croqueted ball, a 'V' is formed between the balls (Figure 4). An imaginary line that splits the 'V' indicates the approximate line of travel for the striker's ball.

The croqueted ball will always travel along the centre line (Figure 2)

The Striking Action

A fine take off croquet stroke is played in the same way as a single ball stroke:

- Always use Stalk, Stance, Swing techniques in any type of shot.
- Stalk the line of aim. Once in the stance, the body should be facing the line of aim (Figure 3), which is slightly into the croqueted ball.
- The swing must be kept straight along the line of aim, and the body kept still as in all strokes (Never turn the head of the mallet.)

- d) Refer to the learning of single ball play – control the strength of shot by the height of the backswing

Coaches Notes:

1. A frequent problem is the “sickle swing” - although facing the line of aim, attempting to steer the striker’s ball into the right course may cause a player to hit the croqueted ball with the side of their mallet during their follow through (A Fault) and/or widening the angle during the swing causing the croqueted ball to not move. The turn ends in both cases.
2. Encourage players to follow the stalk-stance-swing technique when playing a croquet shot. This reinforces the idea that there is little difference between this and a single ball shot. (It is important that a player learns this early in their playing career to avoid later problems with the shot.)
3. If, having approached the balls, a player sees that they have moved apart, encourage replacement of ball and following the approach procedure again.
4. Discourage use of the phrase “take a fine” at every opportunity. This promotes the idea that there is only one form of take-off. Insist that the term “fine take-off” be used for this type of shot.
5. Introduce some of the rules of croquet strokes:
 - Double hits and ‘*shepherding*’
 - Dead ball
 - Sending a ball off the lawn in a croquet stroke and lining in (which balls and when)



Practice routines

- 1) Take-off from the baulk to the peg and hit the peg. For variation, take-off from the corner spot making sure that the croqueted ball does not go out.
- 2) Hoop approach from the non-playing side to get position to run the hoop. Run the hoop and roquet again.
- 3) Take-off from corner 1 to a ball in corner 2. Player to roquet this ball. Point out that should either ball go off the court, the turn would finish. For variation, take-off from corner 1 to corner 3. Other variations should prove easier.
- 4) Place balls near Hoops 1, 2, 3 and 4. Take a 5th ball and take-off from Hoop 1 to Hoop 2, Hoop 2 to Hoop 3 etc. trying to work the 4 balls as close as possible to their respective hoops.



Thick Takeoffs

Objective

All take-offs enable the player to send the striker's ball *and* the croqueted ball to a predetermined position on the court. The *thicker* the take-off, or, the smaller the angle between the line of aim and the centre line, the further the croqueted ball will move in relation to the striker's ball.

This shot is best taught after a player has become familiar with the more conventional fine take-off.

Takeoffs have a continual progression from very fine takeoff (where the croqueted ball just shakes) to the "half-ball" ("Magic angle") shot where both balls travel virtually the same distance.

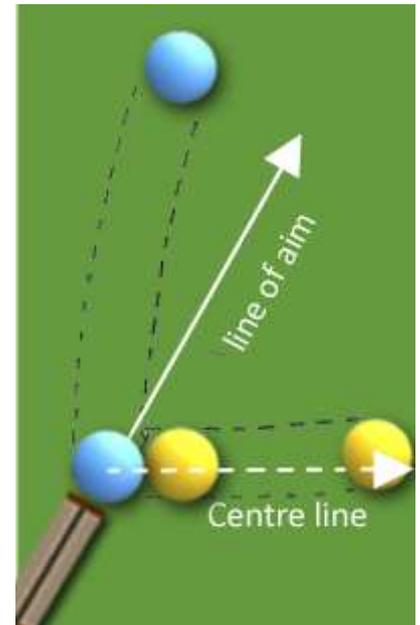
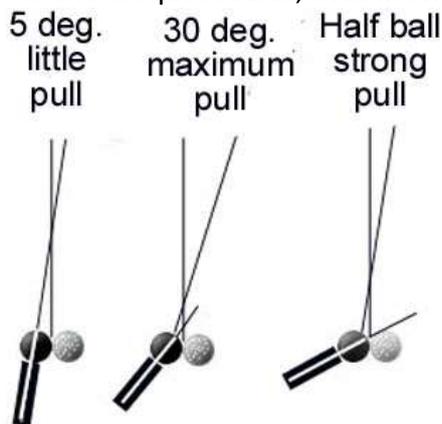


Figure 5: 'Pull' effect.

Method

1. The mallet is aimed more toward the croqueted ball than for the fine take-off. The angle between the line of aim and the centre line is being reduced.
2. This stroke needs more power than for the fine take-off because more energy will be transferred to the croqueted ball, thus moving both balls a more equal distance.



3. To find the direction for the striker's ball, use the method already described for the fine take-off but the more the mallet is aimed towards the croqueted ball, the more allowance has to be made for "pull".

When aiming with the arrow or "V" method described earlier allowance will need to be made for this. If taking off from the left of a croqueted ball, aim further to the right to allow for pull. If taking off from the right, aim further to the left.



Practice

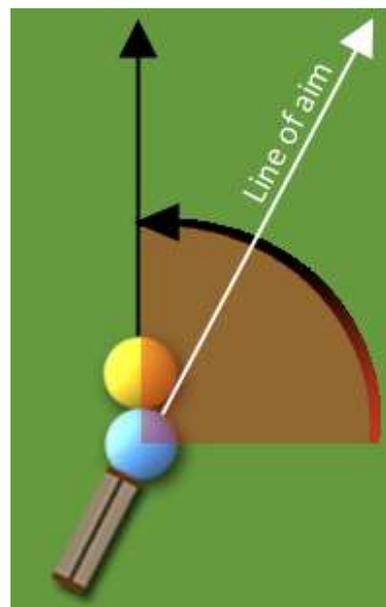
- Take-off thickly from a ball on the west boundary level with Hoop 2 to a ball near Hoop 1. The croqueted ball should travel to a position in front of Hoop 2 (Pioneer ball). Roquet, croquet and run hoop 1.
- Take-off on the west side of the peg (about a yard) to a ball at Hoop 3. The croqueted ball should travel to the east side of the peg (about a yard). This enables the break to be continued more easily.

Straight Drives, Stop shots and Rolls

As the striker's line of aim moves closer to the centre line, more energy is transferred to the croqueted ball, thus causing the croqueted ball to travel further than the striker's ball in a standard stroke.

When the line of aim becomes the same as the centre line, both balls will travel in the same direction of course. This is referred to as a straight croquet stroke and the distance that each ball travels will depend on the type of stroke played.

We may want to send the croqueted ball a long way and the striker's ball a short distance, or, we may want to send both balls about the same distance. Figure 6 illustrates what effect that various *types* of strokes will have on the striker's ball in a croquet stroke. In this case, a straight croquet stroke, where the croqueted ball travels the same distance in each type of stroke.



It is the ratio between the croqueted ball and the striker's ball in each type of stroke that the striker needs to become familiar with. This will vary from player to player depending on their style and mallet characteristics.

STOP SHOT:		
DRIVE:		
½ ROLL		
FULL ROLL		

Figure 6: *Types* of croquet strokes.



The Drive

The drive shot is the basic croquet stroke. It is played like a single-ball stroke with a comfortable grip, hands in normal position, and with a normal follow-through. It is the cornerstone of break play.

Most new players enjoy this shot. It is generally the first of the croquet strokes to be taught as it is a natural progression from a single ball stroke using the usual grip, stance and follow through. Experienced players plan their breaks to maximise the number of croquet strokes they can play as drives.

Method

- The drive is played with a normal grip and stance. Players should use a pendulum swing from the shoulders with the balls being struck as the shaft reaches the vertical.
- The swing should follow through on a straight line towards the aiming point. See the mallet hit the back of the striker's ball and follow through with the mallet towards the aiming point.
- The body should be kept still.
- Body weight should remain evenly balanced over the feet and the player should finish the stroke in a perfectly balanced position.

Effect

- The front of the ball should travel approximately 3 to 5 times the distance of the back ball. The distance ratios will depend on the individual player, the type of mallet, grip used, and follow-through. Players need to practice this stroke in order to learn their natural drive ratio.



Practice

- Set up a straight drive on the 'A' baulk line south of hoop 1. Play a drive stroke attempting to finish with the back ball in front of hoop 1, and observe where the forward ball ends up. (You can attempt to run the hoop if you get good position.)
The key here is to develop consistency in the basic drive stroke both in the positioning of the back ball (the one your mallet strikes), but also to be able to achieve a repeatable ratio of distances which the two balls go.
- Repeat with other distances.
Use flags or other markers – get an idea of the maximum power drive you can play while maintaining control (and ensuring the forward ball stays on the lawn!). The drive is the most commonly played croquet stroke in the middle of a break, and when approaching hoops.

The Stop Shot



Aim: The aim of a stop shot is to make the croqueted ball travel a long way, while minimising the distance that the striker's ball travels.

Method:

- The player takes a stance further back from the ball than with the drive and the mallet is gripped at the TOP of the handle. 'Split grips' are discouraged as these can cause wrist pain and too much 'lower hand' influence on the shot may restrict effectiveness and accuracy.
- A normal swing is used with the balls being struck after the shaft has gone past the vertical position.
- Some players get better results by stopping the heel of the mallet on the ground. Another method is to loosen the grip on the mallet at the moment of the strike.
- The body should be kept still as any forward movement results in the stroke becoming a drive.

"The mallet should be held more loosely than normal, and the player should perhaps stand a little further back from the ball. As well as preventing the mallet from following through, this shot also reduces the top spin roll imparted to the player's ball."

Effect

- The front ball should travel approximately 5 - 8 times the distance of the back ball.
- The result of the stroke is determined by the design of the mallet and the player's style.
- The stroke gets its name from the 'stopping' of the striker's ball.



Practice:

- Set up a straight stop shot on the 'A' baulk line south of hoop 1. (as in the drive shot practice) Play a stop shot attempting to send the croqueted ball a similar distance as in the drive shot and observe where the striker's ball stops. The ratio of the two balls should be larger than a drive shot ratio.
- Hoop approach with the balls being 2 feet or less from the hoop. The back swing should be very small for these delicate strokes.
- With the balls alongside the 5th hoop, attempt to stop shot the croqueted ball over the north boundary and stop the striker's ball before it reaches the peg.



The half roll



The half roll is played like a drive while standing forward over the balls. The further over the balls the player stands, the further the back ball will go in relation to the front ball. In addition, it is common (particularly for standard grip players) to move the bottom hand further down the mallet to control the stroke.

At the moment of the strike, the shaft of the mallet handle is leaning slightly forwards. The mallet causing the ball to be hit above the centre line (from the ground). This action causes the striker's ball to roll further. The angle at which the ball is hit determines the degree of roll (from a quarter roll up to a half or even more)

Method

- From a standard stance position with the mallet grounded, step a little further forward. Keep body and arms at the same angles so that when a small step is taken, the mallet tilts and the distance between the shaft of the mallet and the striker's body remains the same.



The handle of the mallet is sloping forward because the player has walked forward. (This is not because the hands are stretched out in front.)

- Keep the top hand close to the top of the mallet and the bottom hand may be a little down the handle - but no more than half way.
- During the swing, the follow through is downwards and forwards.

The back ball will often jump when struck in this way. Use the swing of the mallet for the required distance rather than a long follow through. Once the stance is set then the shot is the same as for the drive except for the forward tip of the mallet.



Practice

- Set up a straight stop shot on the 'A' baulk line south of hoop 1. (as in the drive & stop shot practice) Play a half roll attempting to send the croqueted ball a similar distance again and observe where the striker's ball stops. The striker's ball should travel well beyond hoop 1 and perhaps level with the peg if the croqueted ball is reaching hoop 2.
- Set the balls up just ahead of Hoop 1 and send the forward ball to Hoop 3 and the striker's ball to the peg.

The Full Roll



In a straight croquet stroke, a full roll is used to send both balls similar distances. (We will look at *split shots* later)

Principles

- As in all croquet strokes, both balls must be in contact.
- The swing is a translation or piston action, not a pendulum swing.

Method

For a full roll, hold the mallet near the bottom of the shaft with your bottom hand. Your hand must not touch the mallet head at any point during the stroke, but it should be close to it. Your other hand should be part-way up the shaft, well away from the other hand. The power of the stroke comes from the bottom hand and the top hand stabilises the mallet throughout the stroke.

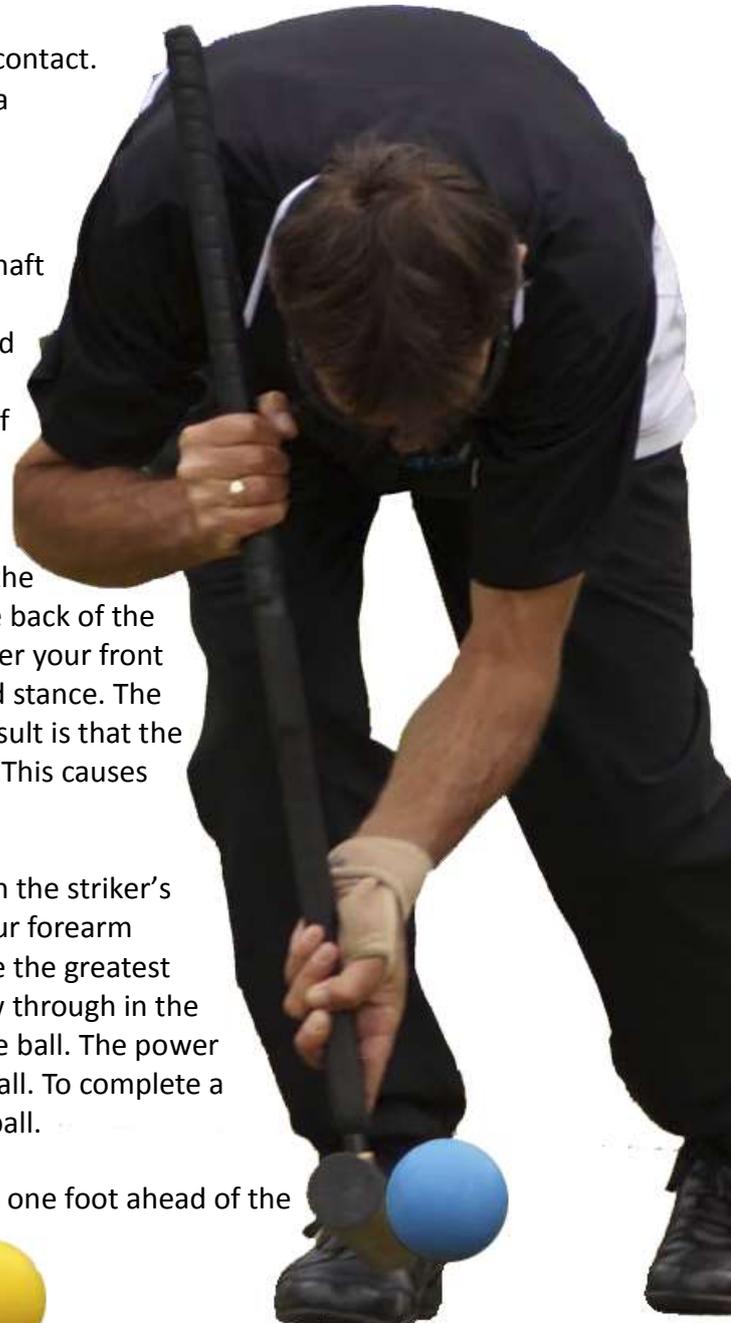
Take a stance where you are well-balanced, eyes over the striker's ball, and with your front toe just level with the back of the striker's ball. Your weight should be balanced either over your front foot, or evenly over both feet if you have a level-footed stance. The shaft of the mallet is angled forward of vertical. The result is that the face of the mallet will strike the ball above half height. This causes the back ball to roll further.

Keep your body still throughout stroke – swing through the striker's ball, accelerating downwards into the contact, with your forearm coming through along the line of aim – this will provide the greatest power and will minimise chances of wrist injury. Follow through in the direction of your aiming point, but do not shepherd the ball. The power of a full roll comes from “punching” into the striker's ball. To complete a successful stroke, you must see your mallet strike the ball.

Remain balanced throughout the stroke. A stance with one foot ahead of the other will help.

Effect

Both balls will travel closer together than with a stop shot or drive. The ratio will depend on how far the shaft of the mallet is angled forward from the vertical position and how low the bottom hand is on the mallet shaft.



Variations

When a player has difficulty generating sufficient power for long roll shots using a centre stance, encourage them to try using a side stance (Figure: 7)

A side stance, where both feet are on a single side of the line of aim, enables more movement of the lower arm and a larger backswing, thus producing more power in the stroke. Beware to keep the swing straight along the line of aim throughout the stroke.



Figure 7: Side stance styles demonstrated.



- Set up a straight roll shot on the 'A' baulk line south of hoop 1. (as in the previous croquet stroke practice routines) Play a roll attempting to send the croqueted ball and the striker's ball a similar distance. With less concern for specific distances, initially focus on stroke technique.
- From the 'A' Baulk line, attempt straight full roll strokes at various distances i.e. both balls level with hoop 1, level with hoop 5, level with hoop 1 etc.

Coaches Note:

Players have often gained a better understanding of accuracy and feel of roll shots, and develop a more balanced stance by imagining that they are *bowling* their striker's ball to a certain spot on the lawn. (The power for a roll is generated through the lower hand). Avoid lifting shoulders through the stroke, thus keeping eyes on the spot where the mallet will strike the ball.

A forward leaning stance and most weight supported in the front of each foot (with eyes directly above the ball) will assist optimal power. (Figure 8) Accelerate the forward swing with a punch - and through the contact spot on the ball.



Figure 8: Maintaining good balance throughout the roll stroke. Note body positions before and after the stroke.

Split Shots

A split shot is the croquet shot played where the striker is intending to send both balls forward, and in different directions.

In figure 9, the striker's Yellow is taking croquet from Blue. In this stroke, the croqueted ball (Blue) will be sent to a pioneer position at hoop 5, and the striker's ball (Yellow) will be sent close to Red at hoop 4 (pilot ball) for the next roquet. Both balls are travelling in different directions, hence a split croquet stroke is required.

In a croquet stroke, the striker's ball is almost always the *critical ball* concerning the outcome of the shot. It should end up in hoop running position or within easy hitting distance of the next ball to be roqueted in the continuation shot.

Method

1. **Determine the destination for the croqueted ball.** In this example (figure 9) it's adjacent to hoop 5. Place the striker's ball against the croqueted ball so that the *centre line* created through the centre of each ball is pointed to where the croqueted ball is to be sent to. (Figure 10). The centre line always defines the direction of travel for the croqueted ball.

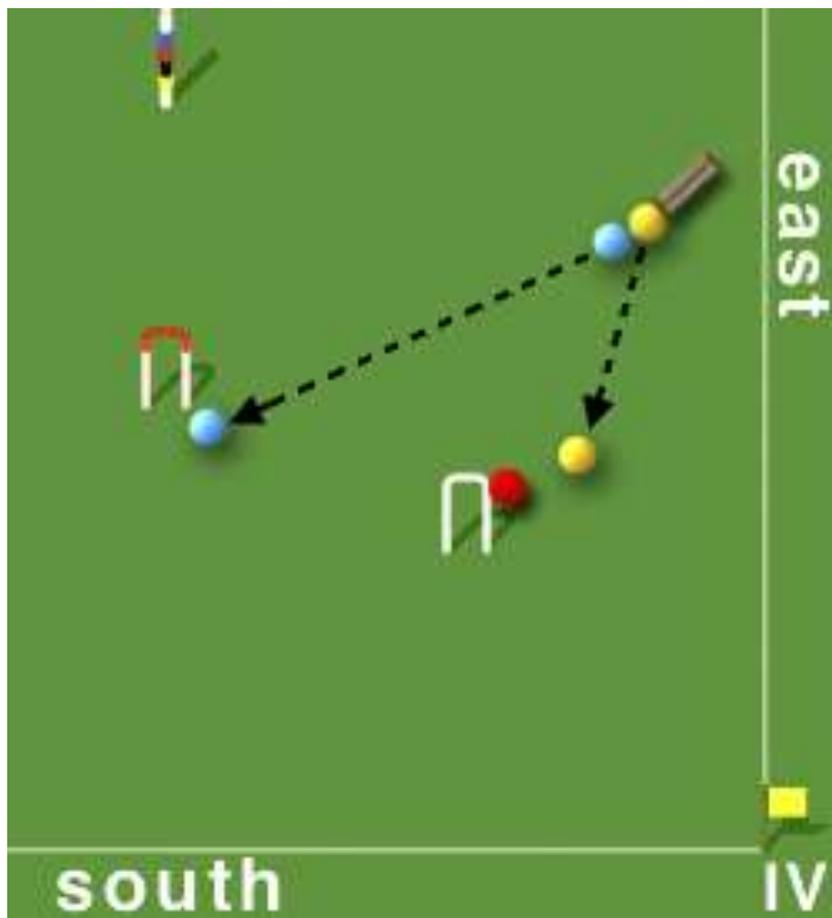


Figure 9: Split croquet stroke

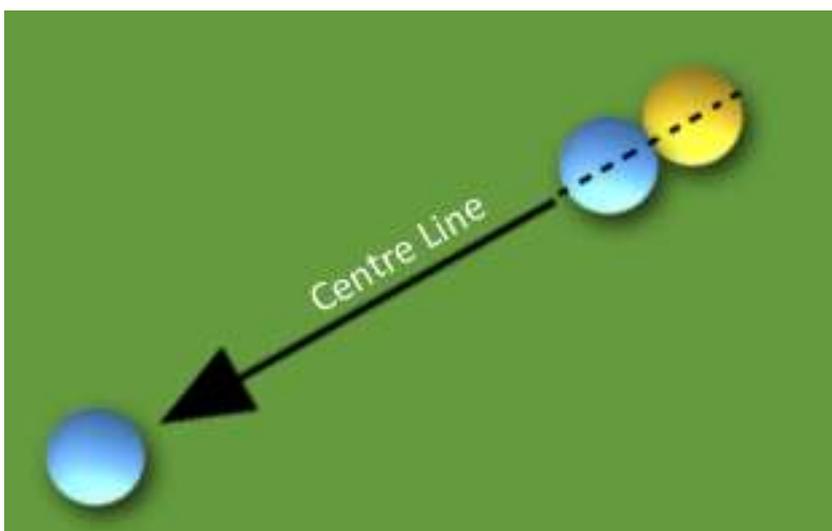


Figure 10: Direction of travel for the croqueted ball.

2. **Determine the Line of Aim** by splitting the angle between the centre line (croqueted ball line of travel) and the striker's ball line of travel (Figure 11).

In this example (Figure 9) select an aiming point that is approximately half way between hoop 5 and the red ball at hoop 4. The mallet must follow the Line of Aim throughout the entire stroke. (Turning the mallet toward the striker's destination during the stroke will widen the angle and consequently, the striker's ball will split off at a wider angle than intended).

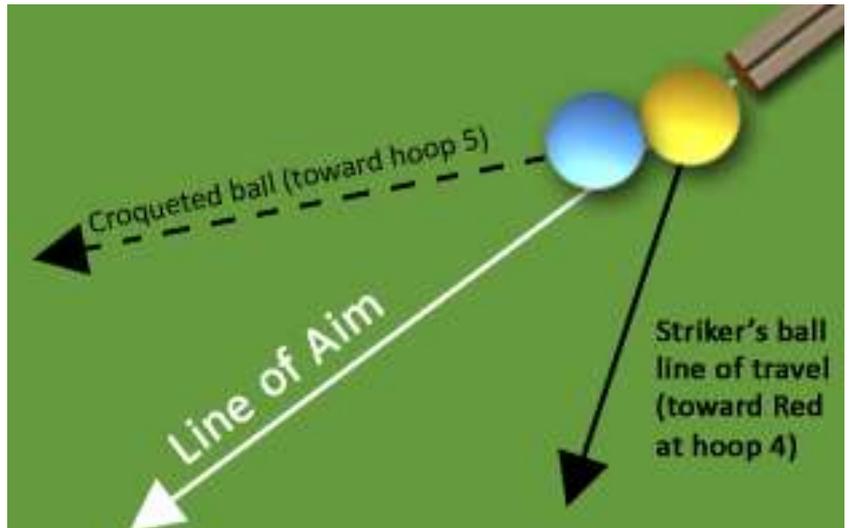


Figure 11: Line of Aim, ½ way between destinations.

3. **Determine the type of croquet stroke required.**

All styles of croquet strokes discussed in Straight Drives, Stop shots and Rolls can be applied to a split shot and the type of croquet stroke played will determine the distance that each ball travels. As the angle between the Centre Line and the Line of aim increases, the energy of the stroke increases for the striker's ball and the striker's grip will rise up the mallet shaft accordingly - from a full roll position with both balls heading in the same direction to an upright stance (as if a single ball stroke) for a take-off. (Figure 12)

In the example (Figure 9), the Striker's ball will travel approximately 2/3 the distance that the croqueted ball will travel.

Depending on the striker's own style, a stroke somewhere between a ½ roll and a full roll will be used.

Having determined the type of croquet stroke required to send both balls the required distances, stalk and swing the mallet along the line of aim through the centre of the striker's ball.

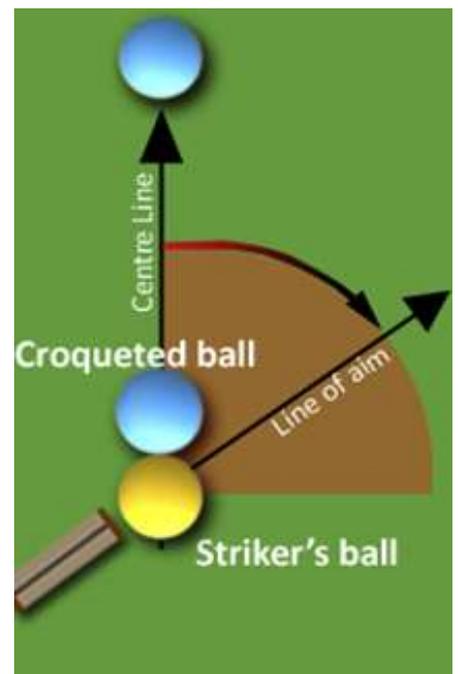


Figure 12: Type of croquet stroke effects the distance of both balls.

Note that when the intention is to send each ball a different distance, the correct line of aim will alter. The best way to learn how the line of aim will affect the line of travel for the striker's ball is to practice croquet strokes of various distances and degrees of separation.



Practice

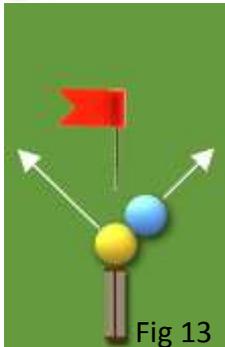


Fig 13

Using a split drive croquet stroke (with follow through), place a corner flag on the line of aim about 1 foot beyond the striker's ball. As the striker swings through and the balls separate, the striker's mallet will hit the corner flag wire. Encourages the striker to keep the swing straight along the line of aim. (Fig 13)

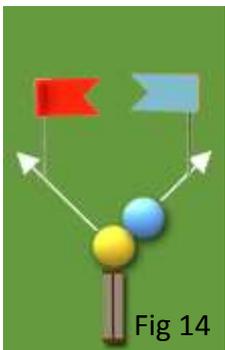


Fig 14

Place corner flags on each line of travel for varying degrees of split and distance, attempting to cause both balls to hit the corner flags in the croquet stroke (Fig 14). Progressively moving the striker's ball target toward or away from the croqueted ball target demonstrates the effect the line of aim will have on the striker's ball direction of travel.

Other types of markers can be used.... Can lids, hoops, etc.

A sequence of croquet strokes:

- Start with the balls about 10 yards up the East boundary line and send the croqueted ball to hoop 5, and the striker's ball to hoop 4.
- Then beside Hoop 4, send the croqueted ball to hoop 6 and the striker's ball to hoop 5.
- Then beside hoop 5, send the croqueted ball to 1-back and the striker's ball to hoop 6.

Full rolls:

- Adjacent to the centre peg, send the croqueted ball to hoop 3 and the striker's ball to hoop 2.
- From just past hoop 1, send the croqueted ball to hoop 3 and the striker's ball to hoop 2.

Another common shot in AC, is a split roll shot from hoop 2, sending the croqueted ball to hoop 4 and the striker's ball to hoop 3.

Hoop Approaches

Objectives

- The ideal position for the hoop approach is approximately one yard in front and slightly to one side or the other.
- The roqueted ball should be rushed into these areas to approach the hoop in the croquet stroke.
- The ideal positions in figure 15 allow the croqueted ball to be promoted past the hoop (so it can be roqueted easily after the striker has run the hoop). The hoop approach from these positions also ensures that the croquet stroke is almost straight (*not split*) which is the easiest and most reliable type of croquet stroke.

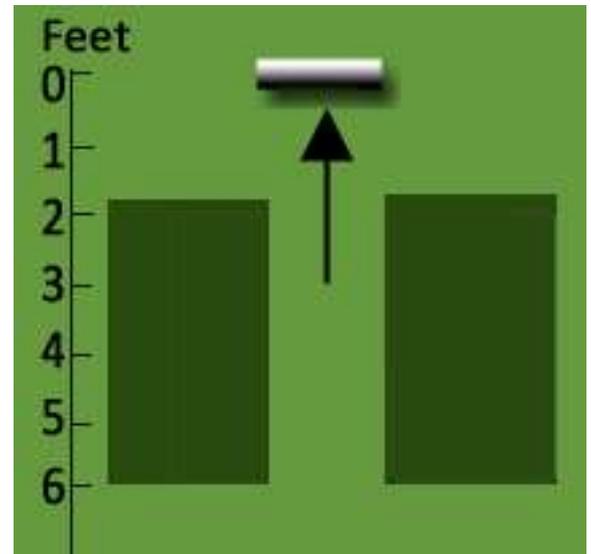


Figure 15: Ideal hoop approach positions

- Before a player tries to run a hoop, the spot where the forward ball must go should be selected.

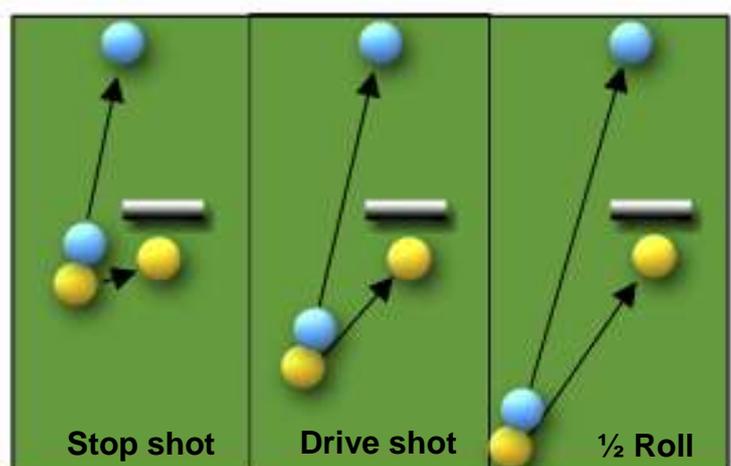
This will depend on the way the player runs the hoop (hard or with control) and where they wish to go following it (forward or to the side). If the ball is to go forwards, the player needs to be a little further back from the hoop when playing the croquet stroke to ensure the forward ball goes well ahead.

- The player should aim to play all strokes as flat smooth drives. This allows room for correction:

There is sometimes a tendency for players, often encouraged by other club members, to use roll or stop shots to approach hoops. They then use these methods at all times regardless of where they need balls to be after running the hoop. The type of shot selected should be chosen on its merits for getting each ball to its optimal position.

Correcting a hoop approach:

- If the ball is rushed too close to the hoop (before making it), then the player must use a stop shot to send the croquet ball further forward.
- If the ball is too far from the hoop, then a roll of some degree may be employed.



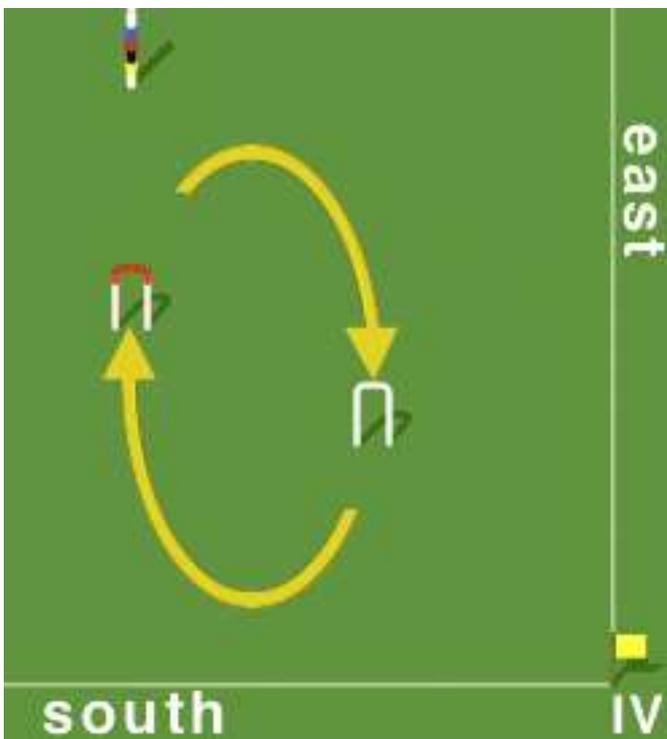


Practice

Practice a hoop approach from the optimal positions (Figure 15) and running the hoop with control, achieving a rush toward the next hoop in order. This emphasises where the croqueted ball should be sent to in the approach croquet stroke, and introduces controlled hoop running.

Practice on various hoops to alter croqueted ball positions – Approach hoop 1 and achieve a forward rush to hoop 2. Approach hoop 2, achieving a rush to hoop 3 etc.

Laps:



This is an excellent, more advanced exercise for practicing hoop approaches from varied positions, choosing optimal positions for the croqueted ball on the hoop approach shot, and for controlled hoop running.

Select two hoops closest to each other that form a circle shaped course (not a figure 8) – hoop 1 and rover, hoop 4 and 5, hoop 3 and 6 etc. Start with a croquet stroke to approach the outermost hoop, then playing the sequence of roquet – croquet – continuation, try to maintain a break with the two balls around the two hoops repeatedly. See how many hoops can be scored in the break before failing a shot.

