



MODULE L1M9

HANDICAP PLAY

Association Croquet



Introduction

Association croquet players are assigned official handicaps as soon as they are ready to begin competitive play. Handicaps start at 24, and go down as low as -4 (the top dozen players in New Zealand have this handicap).

In a handicap singles game, the difference between handicaps of players determines how many extra turns the weaker (higher-handicapped) player receives. The extra turns are indicated by white sticks, also called “bisques”, which are stuck vertically into the ground at the start of the game, and are removed and laid on the ground as the corresponding extra turns (coincidentally, also known as bisques) are used.

Half bisques are also sometimes awarded (for example, when a handicap 18 player plays a handicap 1.5 player). A half bisque, like the bisque, is an extra turn, but it differs in that no point(s) can be scored in a half-bisque turn. A bisque cannot be exchanged for two half bisques.

Why play handicap?

The handicap system gives weaker players an equal chance of winning any handicap game. Used properly, bisques give weaker players the opportunity to play breaks involving several hoop points in a turn. Your handicap is the number of bisques you are expected to need to score 24 hoop points and 2 peg points in two all-round breaks.

Handicap play enables players to experience competitive games with a very wide range of different opponents. This includes top club, regional and international players – all of whom are likely to pass on some tips to you in post-match discussions. It also includes complete beginners who will be grateful to hear words of wisdom from you.

When Are Bisques Used?

A bisque is taken after the final stroke of the normal turn, and the player must indicate to their opponent the intent to take a bisque before leaving the court. (The opponent *must* point out if there is a continuation stroke to be played before the bisque turn begins.

The bisque allows the player to start a new turn using the *same ball*. Players who quit the court or indicate that a bisque is not being taken, may **not** then change their mind and take a bisque. Conversely, players who have indicated their intention to take a bisque **are** permitted to change their mind.

A player must indicate whether a whole bisque or a half-bisque is being taken otherwise it is assumed that a whole bisque is being used.





Responsibility for Bisques

Bisques are given to the lower handicapped (stronger) player who keeps a record of the number of bisques available to their opponent. They are stuck in the ground where both players can see them and removed as they are used by the player.

Rules note: Pegging Out in Handicap Games

A player may only peg out their own Rover ball if both team balls are Rovers (i.e. for the peg) or if another ball has already been pegged out.

A player may peg out an opponent's ball with their own Rover ball, even if their partner ball is not a Rover.

When to take a bisque

1. Wait until there are 4 balls on the lawn, and use bisques to establish, and continue, a four-ball break.
2. Holding onto your bisques is an invitation to a stronger player to manipulate play to make you waste them – use your bisques constructively and keep that break going.
3. If you fail a hoop onto the wire, or to another position which will take 2 bisques to keep going – check how many bisques you have left, and make a decision on whether or not to keep going at this time.

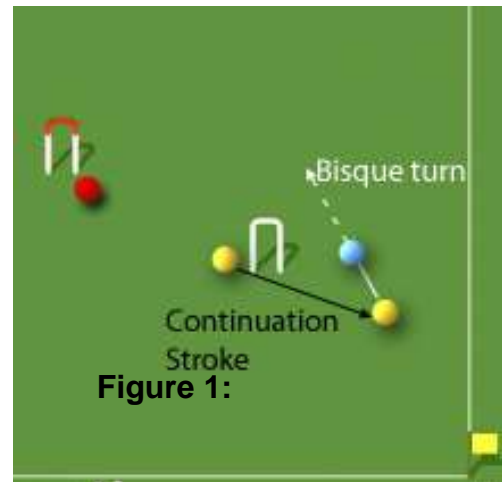
Remember that while your opponent is sitting down they can't affect your play – and if you have enough bisques (equal or near to your handicap), the best way for you to win the game is to take two breaks around using those bisques.

How to take a bisque

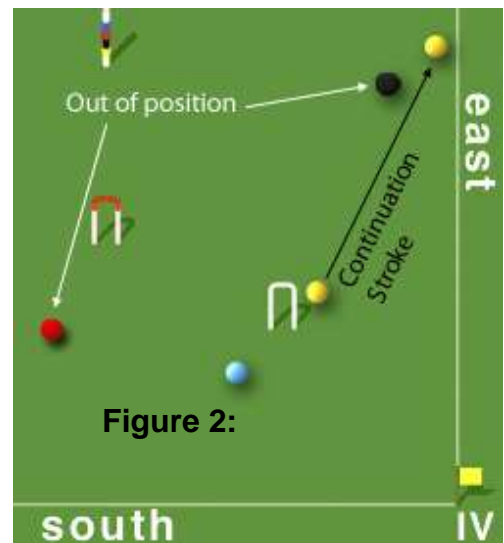
Practically speaking, you take a bisque by telling your opponent that you wish to take a bisque. Make sure you see your opponent acknowledge that he has heard and understood your intention. The opponent will pull a bisque out of the ground when one is taken.

Tactically,

1. Use bisques to continue a break if the balls are suitably positioned.
2. If you don't get good hoop position and the *forward* ball is not in an ideal position for a useful rush had you made the hoop, use the final stroke of the current turn (the continuation stroke) to either get position behind the ball near your hoop to get a perfect rush to the hoop - then take a bisque. The croqueted ball can then be placed in a more useful position in the hoop approach stroke. In Figure 1, yellow has failed to get position at hoop 4 and the forward croqueted ball would be better placed on the West side of Hoop 4 for a rush back toward the pivot or hoop 5 pioneer once the hoop is run. An extra turn taken to rush blue back to a hoop approach position where the croqueted ball and the striker's ball can be better placed is good use of a bisque.



3. Alternatively, use the continuation stroke to shoot over to a ball that is out of position for your 4 ball break, then use the bisque to tidy up your break before coming back to the ball still placed near your hoop. In Figure 2, Yellow has failed to get a good hoop running position at hoop 4. A bisque could be used to bring Black back into the break and tidy the Red pioneer ball at hoop 5, before returning to the Blue ball at hoop 4.



4. If the opponent has laid up on the line, shoot firmly for their balls knowing that if you miss, your ball will be a line ball right beside them (a good opportunity to take a bisque).
5. If you have a long shot mid-turn, or your opponent's turn has ended with their balls away from boundaries, shoot gently so that a bisque can be taken should the roquet be missed.
6. A half-bisque is best used to set out a break followed by the taking of a whole bisque to score the points.

When you have lots of bisques

The Start of the Game

It is always better to go second if you have bisques, so that you can have the first play when all four balls are on the lawn. If you have a half bisque – use that first to set up the break, then start using full bisques.

Leaves

Lift hoops do not apply in handicap matches. Therefore, a break can be played all the way to the peg without conceding a lift to your opponent.

As a general rule, when you have finished your turn, you should leave the lawn with your balls together and the opponent well separated. There are three common options available to you after the first break if you used less than or approximately half of your bisques:

- Place an opponent ball at hoop 1, and the other opponent ball at hoop 2, and join up somewhere on the east boundary with a rush to one of those balls (this is the easiest leave to construct) (**Figure 3**)
- Cross-wire the opponent at hoop 1, and join up with your partner ball near corner 3. This option gives the opponent the longest possible shot, but has the downsides that it might take a couple of bisques to put together, is a complete disaster if you don't get the cross-wire, and virtually guarantees the opponent an all-round break if they roquet any ball, which might cost you the game (**Figure 4**)
- Separate the opponent balls widely onto, or near, boundaries ... and then separate your own balls. Do this if you have more than half of your bisques remaining. There is no position from which you cannot set up a 4 ball break using two bisques – what you need to ensure is that your opponent has as difficult a time as possible in establishing their own break if they hit in. (**Figure 5**)

Final thought on bisques

The problem with bisques is that: as soon as you learn to use bisques well to make breaks... your handicap will drop and you'll have less of them!

Break play is the key to association croquet.



Figure 3:



Figure 4:



Figure 5:



Practice

Break Laps:

Starting with the balls set out in standard 4 ball pivot ball break positions with a dolly rush to hoop 1, play a break of 12 hoops and peg out both balls (Partner ball and striker's ball) counting the number of bisques used to complete the task.

This is a good exercise to measure over time, trying to reduce the number of bisques used. In playing a 4 ball break, all the shots required in Association Croquet are practiced.



Full Bisque Croquet

Full-bisque play is a great way to promote break play with bisques. Both players get a number of bisques equal to their handicap.

A good alternative to combine break play with having an interactive game is to set a base, which everyone subtracts from their handicap and gets the difference in bisques. For example, if a 20 and a 12 play a handicap game with base 8, the handicap 12 player gets 4 bisques, and the handicap 20 gets 12 bisques. (Players with handicap below the base do not get any bisques.)

Coaching note: Encourage beginners to play games of a base equal to about half of the lowest handicap. This will give both players plenty of opportunities to play positively.

The best way to learn about handicap games and tactics is to play handicap matches - as a player joins a club and is assigned a Handicap, they should be encouraged to participate in the club competitions for the CNZ Arthur Ross Memorial Event – a handicap singles event. With the highest number of bisques available to them, it is an excellent opportunity to experience handicap matches and to become familiar