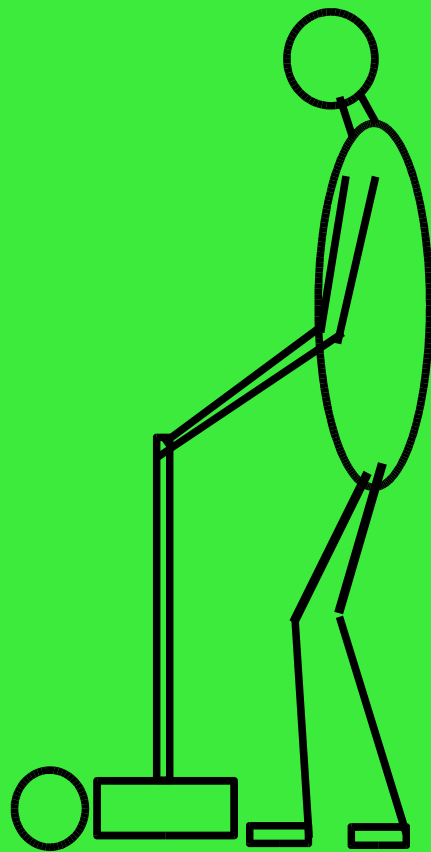


CROQUET TECHNIQUE



by John Riches

CONTENTS

	page
INTRODUCTION	2
THE ROQUET	3
THE HOOP SHOT	5
THE TAKE-OFF	6
THE RUSH	7
THE DRIVE	9
THE STOP-SHOT	10
THE HALF-ROLL	12
THE THREE-QUARTER ROLL	13
THE ROLL	15
THE PASS ROLL	16
THE SPLIT SHOT	17
THE APPROACH SHOT	20
CONCLUSION	22

INTRODUCTION

1. In the notes on croquet technique which follow, it is assumed that the player will be of medium height and build, and uses the centre style with a standard grip. An experienced coach dealing with a particular individual may well decide to vary some of the advice given here, though almost all of it will prove sound for any player, regardless of stature, style or grip.

2. No mention is made of the need to make adjustments for different types of balls. A learner should keep to one type of ball only.

3. It is hoped that these notes will prove useful not only to beginners, but also to coaches, and especially to experienced players wishing to correct some flaw or improve some weakness in their game.

It is often difficult to find out exactly why a shot is not consistently producing the desired result, as you cannot easily observe yourself in action. A good coach who understands clearly the correct technique will be of inestimable help, but if you do not have access to such a person, a thoughtful perusal of these notes may at least prove second best.

4. If you have a shot which you wish to improve, you may discover on reading these notes that your technique is not as recommended here. You may have developed a reasonable alternative, or you may have developed bad habits which unless eradicated will prevent you from making any progress. The decision whether to change or not may not be an easy one; but if you do decide to make a change, do not look for an immediate and dramatic improvement. You should not expect to do as well with a good technique you have not practised as you were doing with a bad technique you have practised for years.

5. Unfortunately there are no illustrations accompanying these notes at the present time, as the author ('collator' would be a better term, as nothing here is original) is notoriously inartistic.

6. All basic shots are covered, but more advanced shots such as cannons, jump-shots, hammer shots, etc., are beyond the scope of these notes.

7. Strategy and tactics are also not mentioned, though they may be more important to the development of a player than technique. The notes will explain how to play a particular shot, but will not tell you which shot to play.

8. The purpose of this booklet is to fill what is seen as a void. There are croquet books available with much excellent information about how to play various shots, but none give in any comprehensive way the REASONS for doing things the way they recommend. Here you will find not only the latest technique fully detailed, but also the REASONS explained at length - perhaps too much length for the beginner to fully comprehend - so that both coach and player can return to it again and again, and can make sound judgements about the value of alternative methods.

9. While these notes are believed to convey the latest and best techniques currently being used and taught, it is recognised that many players use alternatives which may be as good or almost as good.

10. New techniques are constantly being developed (or at least they should be) and evaluated. This booklet does not represent the last word on the subject by any stretch of the imagination.

THE ROQUET

1. "Stalk" the ball by walking in along the exact line in which you will want the ball to travel, with hips and shoulders square to this line. Always do this, even for the shortest and easiest of shots.

2. Take a firm but comfortable grip on the mallet handle before beginning to move forward. Try not to move the hands up or down the handle from now on.

3. Walk forward toward the ball steadily and purposefully, with your eyes on the line of aim to ensure that you maintain the 'squareness' of your body.

4. If anything distracts you, start again.

5. Place your feet in the correct position. This will vary according to your style, height, grip, mallet, etc.; but you will need to know quite clearly the correct foot placement for your particular stance, so that you can achieve consistency of foot placement. Many (right-handed) players find it best to place the left foot about 4 inches (10 cm) from the line of aim, and 6 inches (15 cm) back from the ball, so that the toe is level with (or just behind) the handle of the mallet at the moment of impact. For most players this foot should be pointing in a direction exactly parallel to the line of aim. This provides a further check on squareness and consistency of stance.

The position of the right foot is less critical. It need not be pointing parallel to the line of aim, but should simply be placed in any comfortable position out of the way of the backswing, so that 'body squareness' and balance can be maintained during the swing.

6. Next, test the 'squareness' of the mallet face to the line of aim by making a few practice swings above or behind the ball without hitting it. Concentrate on keeping your shoulders still during this, and if the face of the mallet is not 'square', correct it by re-aligning your body (feet, hips, shoulders) or by turning the mallet in your hands, but NOT by merely turning the mallet head while maintaining the same grip and stance. Do not place the mallet head on the ground at any time, as this makes it harder to maintain the alignment of the mallet.

7. Fix your eyes on the exact point where you want the mallet face to contact the back of the ball, and concentrate on making a SLOW, REASONABLY LONG backswing. The length of the backswing will depend on the desired strength of the shot i.e. how far you want the ball to go.

8. Allow the mallet to swing smoothly forward to hit the ball, again concentrating on keeping your shoulders still and watching the contact point on the ball.

There should be NO PUSH WHATEVER imparted to the mallet during the forward swing. Rather, it should feel as if you are merely GUIDING the forward movement of the weight in the mallet head, or even slightly PULLING it forward. The arms should swing freely from the shoulders so that the hands move FORWARDS throughout the swing, and until the instant of contact they should be slightly forward of the mallet head (hence the slight 'pulling' feel).

If you have a tendency to push (or worse still, 'jab') during the forward swing, the first thing to do is try taking a longer but slower backswing, and eliminate any shoulder movement.

Most players find (eventually) that they do better with the hands close together (or even interlocking as in golf) on the handle of the mallet, rather than having them apart, as the placing of the lower hand further down the handle usually results in pushing instead of pulling the weight of the mallet during the forward swing.

Your wrists should be kept firm, but not locked tight during the swing - a small degree of flexibility is desirable. Your stance should not be too cramped or crouched. A more upright stance usually allows a freer, straighter swing.

9. The follow-through should be directly along the line of aim, and also as low as possible along the ground. Try not to lift the mallet head upwards before you are forced to do so because your arms will not reach any further forward.

10. It is vital to ensure that your grip tension is not changed during the swing. Many players, especially when nervous, increase the tension by squeezing the handle just before the mallet contacts the ball. This will usually tend to destroy the alignment of the mallet head. (You can test this by holding the mallet still and tightening your grip.) The best way to avoid this is to feel the tension in your finger-tips, rather than the palms of your hands, before commencing the swing. Then you can feel any change more easily because the finger-tips are more sensitive than the palms.

11. **EXPLANATION:**

Many players fail to understand the importance of slightly pulling, rather than pushing, the mallet forwards. If you wish to appreciate the reason for this, take one end of a broom handle and try to PUSH the far end along a straight line. Then see how much easier it is to PULL it along the line. You may also like to consider why a horse pulls a cart rather than pushing it; why it is easier to maintain a straight line by pulling a wheelbarrow rather than pushing it; and why the rear wheel of a bicycle follows a straighter path than the front wheel during a 'slalom-type' manoeuvre.

12. **COACHING HINT:**

In order to learn the correct type of straight swing, it can be very helpful to practise playing short roquets and hoops using one hand only. Use your TOP hand on the shaft, with the bottom hand completely removed. This will force you to take a long backswing and move the top hand FORWARD throughout the swing, pulling the mallet-head forward rather than pushing it. You will also need to watch the ball closely and avoid all other body movement, or you are likely to miss the ball altogether. You should soon learn to control the movement of the one hand adequately and time the swing correctly; and you will probably be surprised at how well you can play one-handed roquets. Then the lower hand can be used as a steadying influence only, without imparting any additional force.

At the start of a game it can also be useful to try a few one-handed practice swings in order to get the correct timing. This hint applies especially to players who use the 'Irish' grip; but all centre-style players will find it helpful.

THE HOOP SHOT

The required technique is almost identical to the roquet, with the following additional considerations:

1. It is best to stand slightly further forward than for a roquet. This ensures that the ball is hit slightly downwards, as the mallet has not quite reached the bottom of its swing. The effect of this is that the ball is pressed lightly into the lawn surface, increasing friction on the bottom of the ball. Thus the bottom of the ball is held in check against the ground, while the top starts moving forward. This gives the ball a top-spin (or forward spin) which will tend to carry it on through the hoop if it touches the sides.

2. Hoop shots should not be hit harder than necessary to ensure that the ball passes through the hoop and finishes a yard or two clear on the other side. A slow backswing is essential, followed by a gentle forward swing without any semblance of a push in it. The follow-through should be forwards along the ground, as if you are putting the mallet head gently through the hoop, or would do so if your arms were long enough. You should feel that you are SWEEPING the ball gently through the hoop. Do not look at the hoop during the swing. Keep your eyes on the point where the mallet has contacted the ball, and keep your shoulders still.

3. For a hoop shot from directly in front of the hoop, give additional attention to lining up the exact centre of the ball and the exact centre of the hoop, ensuring that the mallet face is perfectly 'square' to this line of aim at all times. Do not be satisfied to merely hit the ball in the general direction of the hoop and hope that it goes through.

4. For a 'sidey' or angled hoop shot you can no longer aim at the centre of the hoop, but neither should you try, as some suggest, to make the edge of the ball miss the near leg of the hoop. You need instead to concentrate on hitting the CENTRE of the ball where you want THAT to go.

Try aiming the centre of the ball just inside the far leg of the hoop, a little more or less inside depending on the angle at which you are running the hoop. Concentrate on this alone, and follow through 'along the ground' exactly in this line. Keep your shoulders absolutely still throughout. Angled hoop shots need to be hit slightly more firmly than shots from a similar distance directly in front, as the contact with the hoop will take a larger proportion of speed from the ball.

With sidey hoops it is even more important to ensure that the ball is given a forward spin by hitting slightly down on it in the manner described above. A ball hit with a flat forward 'push' will tend to skid rather than roll for the first foot or so. This means that it will usually only just be starting to roll when it reaches the hoop, and may not have sufficient forward spin to carry it on through the hoop. For long hoops (more than 3 feet out) the ball will have stopped skidding and gained sufficient rolling motion regardless of how it is hit, so a flat swing should be satisfactory.

5. As with the roquet, it is important not to increase grip tension by squeezing the mallet handle during the swing.

THE TAKE-OFF

1. For a long take-off to, say, a border ball, allow for the ball to 'pull' inwards by lining up the V about one yard to the right of the ball you are going to (assuming that you are taking off from the right hand side of the ball you had roqueted).

Aim your swing, however, a yard to the left of the ball you are going to. That is, after lining up the V, forget all about the ball you had roqueted and play the shot as if you are attempting to hit a single ball to a spot one yard left of the target ball.

2. If you are taking off from the left hand side of the ball you have roqueted, then line up the V a yard to the LEFT of the target ball and aim a yard to its RIGHT.

3. In many cases you may not wish to aim your take-off directly at the target ball. For example, you may wish to obtain a rush on it to a hoop or to another ball; or if it is on a side border you may decide to aim your take-off a yard or two further in court to reduce the risk of going out over the boundary. In each case, line up the V about one yard to the right (or left) of the point WHERE YOU WANT YOUR BALL TO FINISH, and then aim the swing one yard the other side. The roqueted ball should move about a yard if you play the take-off in this manner, but this distance is usually not of any great importance, as long as it does move. For a shorter take-off the one yard allowance can be reduced.

4. As in other shots, a square mallet face (to the line of swing, NOT to the direction in which the V is pointing) is important. Do NOT turn your mallet face in towards the roqueted ball "to make sure it moves", as this makes it harder to judge the strength of the shot, and also harder to control the place where the roqueted ball will finish, which is sometimes quite important.

5. For a take-off from a corner spot to the diagonally opposite corner, line up the V as exactly as you can, but only about one FOOT to the right (or left) of the place where you want the striker's ball to finish. and take great care to hit your ball directly at a point one FOOT to the other side of the desired finishing point.

The reason for only allowing a foot, instead of a yard, over such a long distance is to reduce the risk of the ball you are taking off going out over the boundary. It should move about one foot only, if the shot is correctly played in the described manner. It normally will not matter if your striker's ball 'pulls' more than the allowed foot, as you would hardly be trying to obtain a rush.

6. It is important that you learn to take off from either side of a roqueted ball with equal confidence. When taking off from your partner ball to go and use the opponent's balls you should try to leave your partner ball in such a place that you can easily obtain a useful rush for your next turn if you have to come back to it without having made any hoops.

7. All take-offs should be played with a follow-through action, allowing the mallet-head to swing through freely. The distance your ball travels can then be controlled very accurately by raising the mallet-head to a particular point on the backswing. It is not recommended to play normal take-offs with a stop-shot action, as this introduces an element of timing which needs additional control, and also may cause the ball to 'pull' in the wrong direction, curving outward rather than inward.

THE RUSH

The rush is similar to a firm roquet shot, with the following additional considerations:

1. Before playing any rush, check whether one or both of the balls is lying in a small hole on the lawn. If so, the desired rush may be very difficult or even impossible. If your (striker's) ball is in the hole, it is quite likely to jump right over the ball you wish to rush if you hit with sufficient force to achieve the intended result.

2. Stand a little further back than for a roquet shot, and slightly raise the front mallet face. Both of these adjustments are designed to ensure, even if the swing is slightly mis-timed, that when the mallet head contacts the ball it is either travelling horizontally or has just begun to swing upward.

It is essential to avoid any tendency to hit downward on the ball, as this can cause the ball to jump. Even a slight jump can cause your ball to hit above centre on the ball you are attempting to rush, losing some of the forward force of the shot. If you are attempting a fine cut-rush, a slight jump may result in a complete miss.

Some players move both hands down the handle a little and take a very firm grip, with wrists locked. This allows a simple pendulum swing from the shoulders, which must be kept absolutely still. The intention of this method is to eliminate the 'slight pulling' effect when the hands move forward ahead of the mallet head as described in the normal roquet shot. (The raising of the front mallet face has changed the wrist position, and hence changed the timing of the 'slight pull', so perhaps the shorter grip also lessens the complications involved in correctly timing the different shots.)

By doing this, they sacrifice a little accuracy of direction, which may not be so critical in a close rush, in order to further ensure that the ball does not jump. As suggested, the element of timing (and hence the possibility of mis-timing) in the shot is reduced, but the amount of force which must be imparted by the arms is increased, because the weight in the head of the mallet does less of the work.

3. When playing a straight rush, concentrate on swinging along the exact line of centres of the two balls. Again it is important to keep the mallet face square to the line of swing, as even a slight inaccuracy will result in a large error in the rush. In fact, an inaccuracy which would cause the striker's ball (in a single ball stroke) to miss a hoop by only a few centimetres can cause the rushed ball to finish several yards from the desired hoop.

4. Take a longer backswing than you would if you were hitting a single ball the same distance, and let the mallet 'flow' forward. There is usually a great temptation to PUSH the mallet forwards because you are conscious of the weight of the second ball to be moved; but this temptation must be resisted if consistently good results are to be achieved. If additional force is required (for example, to rush right across a heavy lawn), this should also be achieved by taking a longer and higher backswing, rather than by trying to impart it with the wrists and forearms.

5. There is also a strong temptation during the swing to look at the ball you are attempting to rush, instead of keeping your eyes fixed on the place where your mallet will contact your striker's ball. This leads to shoulder movement, which can be disastrous.

6. If you have a tendency to hit the ground with your mallet on this (or any other) shot, it is because of head and shoulder movement dipping downwards during the swing, in an effort to impart greater force. With correct timing, long backswing and a firm grip, it is quite unnecessary to use any 'push' or body movement to rush a ball right across even the heaviest lawn.

7. The follow-through must be, as always, forwards along the ground. This is of even greater importance in a rush than in other shots, as it helps flatten out the bottom of the swing, ensuring that maximum force from the mallet is imparted to the ball.

8. If you are also 'cutting' the ball you are going to rush, you will need to judge the exact direction in which to hit the CENTRE of your striker's ball in order to cut the rushed ball at the desired angle.

For a normal rush it may be worth remembering that by aiming the centre of your ball at, say, the right hand edge of the ball you are rushing, you can achieve a cut to the left at an angle of approximately 30 degrees from the line of aim, but 15% of the force is lost on impact of one ball on the other.

This loss of force is the reason why most cut-rushes are not hit hard enough, and (if the desired direction is achieved) they tend to fall short of the desired finishing point. A cut-rush needs to be hit appreciably harder than you would hit a single ball to make it travel the same distance. The finer the cut, the more force is lost, and the harder you need to hit.

THE DRIVE

Apart from the take-off, in which the movement of the roqueted ball is more or less incidental, this is the first of the croquet (2-ball) shots in which the movement of both balls requires careful and accurate control.

1. Place your striker's ball against the ball you have roqueted, with the line of centres pointing exactly at the point to which you wish to drive the roqueted ball.

2. Use the same grip and stance as for a roquet, and play the shot in the same way. The direction of swing should be along the line of the desired drive, with the mallet contacting the ball at the bottom of the swing. The grip should be firm enough to ensure a smooth follow-through, in spite of the opposing weight of two balls, rather than one.

3. In order to drive the roqueted ball to a specified point, you will need to hit slightly harder than if you were hitting a single ball the same distance.

4. If the drive is correctly played, the roqueted ball should travel to the desired place, with the striker's ball following behind in the same line but travelling only one-quarter to one-third as far as the roqueted ball. The exact fraction will depend on the weight of the mallet and other factors such as firmness of grip, timing, and follow-through. Most players have little difficulty in achieving reasonably consistent results, as this is the most natural and easiest of croquet shots. For this reason it is common for a player making a break to deliberately set up a drive by playing the previous rush shot to a carefully selected position.

THE STOP-SHOT

This is similar in appearance to the drive, but is played quite differently, in order to make the striker's ball stop short of the place it would travel to in a drive.

1. Place your striker's ball against the roqueted ball, as for a drive, with the line of centres pointing to the place where you want the roqueted ball to finish.

2. Stand slightly further back from your ball than you would for a drive or roquet, and raise the front face of the mallet slightly (about 1cm). This is done, as in the rush shot, to ensure that you do NOT hit downward on the striker's ball and give it topspin or cause it to jump.

3. It is important to check that both your stance and your mallet face are 'square' to the line of swing, so that the maximum force is transmitted to the roqueted ball rather than the striker's ball.

4. The most important and distinctive feature of the stop-shot is that there should be NO FOLLOW-THROUGH at all, or as little as possible. This requires exact timing, and is far more difficult to achieve than it sounds. Very few players can play good stop-shots consistently. With practice you should be able to have the striker's ball travel no further than one-sixth, one-eighth, or even one-tenth as far as the roqueted ball.

5. The mallet itself can be an important factor in determining the fraction achievable in a stop-shot. A heavier mallet, springy handle, and 'soft' mallet face (e.g. wood, as compared with the harder bakelite plastic) all make it harder to play sharp stop-shots, though they may have advantages in some other shots.

6. The backswing should not be shortened for a stop-shot, but players use various methods of trying to achieve the required minimum follow-through:

(a) Some achieve reasonable results by releasing (or relaxing) their grip on the mallet at about the instant of contact.

(b) Some try to keep the hands still so that the arms do not swing from the shoulders. With both hands at the top of the handle, they use the wrists to swing the mallet fairly loosely from the hands.

(c) Some keep a firm grip throughout, often with one hand part-way down the handle, and concentrate on achieving a sharp, flat forward 'jab' which ends at the point of contact between mallet and ball.

(d) Perhaps the best method, but a difficult one to master, is to move both hands well DOWN the handle, take a very tight grip, and jab the mallet firmly downward (still keeping the front mallet face raised slightly) so that it will contact the ground immediately after contacting the ball. This contact of the back of the mallet on the ground checks the forward movement of the mallet, preventing any further followthrough.

Players who manage to combine this method with a rapid BACKWARD movement of the hands just before the instant of contact (in order to jam the back of the mallet very firmly into the ground) seem able to achieve remarkable results with a fair degree of consistency.

Coaches should note that this backward movement of the hands should only be taught after careful consideration, since it can have disastrous results if transferred inadvertently into the swing used for other shots.

It is also important to be aware of the fact that different types of ball will allow quite different results which are very noticeable in the stop-shot. A harder, more elastic ball will allow a much more effective stop-shot.

THE HALF-ROLL

This shot is also similar to the drive, but the intention is to send the striker's ball half as far as the roqueted ball. The differences are as follows:

1. Again place your striker's ball against the roqueted ball with the line of centres pointing in the direction in which you want both balls to travel.

2. Stand further forward over the balls, with your front toe level with the back of your striker's ball, and move your bottom hand down the handle. The position of the hands will vary for different players and different mallets, but you need to know the exact position that gives you the desired result. Most players place the bottom hand almost half-way down the handle for this shot, leaving the other hand at the top.

This stance and grip should enable you to hit **DOWNWARD** on the striker's ball (rather than forward along the ground at it), striking it somewhat above centre.

3. During the shot the handle of the mallet should be sloping forward, making an angle of about 75 degrees with the ground. This causes the striker's ball to be squeezed forward, so that it travels further than in a drive.

4. It is most important that the forward slope of the mallet handle (and consequently the mallet face) should be **MAINTAINED** throughout the swing; and for this to happen both hands must move **FORWARD** at the **SAME RATE**.

5. The grip needs to be firm, with the mallet head following through the ball and onto the ground.

6. The head and shoulders must be kept still throughout the swing. There is a strong temptation to stand up as the mallet contacts the ball, but this alters the slope of the mallet and so the desired result is not achieved.

7. Long or short half-rolls are played in this same manner, but for long shots it is harder to keep the shoulders still and maintain the angle of mallet slope, as a longer backswing with more force is required.

THE THREE-QUARTER ROLL

This is again similar to the drive and half-roll, except that the striker's ball is to travel three-quarters as far as the roqueted ball.

1. Place the balls as for the half-roll, and use the same stance, placing your front foot level with the back of the ball.

2. Move your lower hand further down the shaft, until it is almost two-thirds of the way down (i.e. one-third of the way up from the bottom). The top hand will probably no longer feel comfortable at the top of the handle, and may also be moved a little down the shaft.

3. This change of hand position should produce a greater forward slope of the mallet handle, until it makes an angle with the ground of approximately 60 degrees.

4. The other aspects (firmness of grip, maintenance of slope, still shoulders, follow-through) are as for the half-roll; but the greater forward slope of the mallet will produce a more pronounced squeezing effect to send the striker's ball further forward.

5. Adjustments can be made to both the three-quarter roll and the half-roll by moving the hands slightly up or down the handle, giving a slight change in mallet slope, and causing the striker's ball to travel, say, just over half or just under three-quarters as far as the roqueted ball.

6. It should be obvious that if the roqueted ball is to travel the same distance as in a half-roll while the striker's ball travels further, the three-quarter roll will need to be hit slightly harder. Some players experience difficulty with long three-quarter rolls on a heavy lawn, but if a maximum backswing is used and the arms are swung confidently from the shoulders so that the full force of the mallet goes into the ball, any player should be capable of playing the shot quite easily.

7. Some players use a different technique for this shot, involving a forward push through the bottom of the shot rather than trying to maintain the pronounced forward slope of the mallet. This method sometimes gives rise to doubts concerning the legality of the shot, but should be regarded as legal provided that it is played with a single, smooth swing, rather than allowing the forward movement of the mallet to be checked on contact with the ball and accelerating the mallet head rapidly after the balls have moved apart. A SMOOTH acceleration throughout the swing, combined with a firm grip to ensure that the mallet is not checked when it contacts the ball, should produce a perfectly legal shot.

Some players tend to start the swing with a loose grip, and suddenly tighten it at the instant of contact. This again is likely to produce a shot of doubtful legality.

All questions of legality aside, this method cannot be recommended, as it introduces an element of timing which the 'forward slope and downward hit' method avoids, and which tends to reduce the achievable degree of consistent accuracy.

If you have a springy mallet handle, however, you may possibly achieve better results with the 'push through the bottom' method. The spring helps overcome any marked checking of the mallet head as it contacts the ball (this may be more apparent than real, as the flexibility allows the handle to continue its forward movement even if the head of the mallet is checked), and also tends to 'throw' the striker's ball forward as the deformation straightens out. The springy handle will also probably make it harder to control the accuracy if you use the recommended method, as the downward force tends to be used up in bending the handle rather than squeezing the ball forward.

8. On a soggy or sandy lawn the recommended method may be impractical, as the downward hit can tend merely to bury the ball in the surface, creating an indentation from which the ball can no longer be squeezed forward satisfactorily. This leaves the 'accelerated push' method as the only viable alternative in such conditions.

9. The downward hit (on a firm surface) will often cause the striker's ball to jump into the air noticeably. This is quite OK, and even desirable, as it means that less of the weight of the roqueted ball is preventing the striker's ball from moving forward.

THE ROLL

The full roll, in which the striker's ball travels the same distance as the roqueted ball, is again similar in some ways to the half-roll and three-quarter roll.

1. Again place your striker's ball against the roqueted ball so that the line of centres points in the direction in which you want both balls to travel.

2. Use the same stance once more, placing your front toe level with the back of the striker's ball.

3. Your lower hand should be placed at least two-thirds of the way down the handle, and your top hand will also need to be moved, to about one-third of the way down the handle.

4. This stance and hand position should produce an angle of approximately 45 degrees between the mallet handle and the ground, and this angle should be maintained to the greatest extent possible during the swing.

In order to achieve this, most players need to start with their elbows bent, and then straighten them during the swing until both arms are reaching straight out in front.

5. It is also usually necessary, depending on the length of the roll and the speed of the lawn, to incorporate some degree of push and acceleration which, of course, must be smooth and combined with a firm grip in order to avoid suspicions of illegality. This introduces the element of timing which we have tried to avoid in the previous rolls, and thus decreases the consistent accuracy one can expect to achieve. The follow-through should be as long as possible, with the mallet head moving low along the ground.

To the extent that the shot involves a pushing rather than squeezing action to send the striker's ball forward, it will be necessary to concentrate on swinging forward through the balls rather than downwards; but the mallet should still, as in any roll, contact the ball above centre.

6. Players who have difficulty with this shot are usually standing up markedly as they play the shot. This shoulder movement alters the angle of the mallet handle and prevents both hands from moving forwards at the same rate. They also tend to HIT at the balls rather than SWEEPING the two balls forward.

The remedy is to keep your shoulders still (get someone to put a hand firmly on the back of your shoulders and physically prevent them from moving upwards), and to overcome the 'hitting rather than sweeping' tendency, try using a shorter backswing. If you find it hard to actually shorten the backswing, practise playing the roll from a position just behind a hoop, so that the backswing is hampered by the hoop.

7. Long rolls require considerable force, in order to move two balls (a total of 6 lb in weight) over a distance of up to 30 yards, and for this reason it is important that both arms swing freely forwards from still shoulders, with a firm grip and eyes fixed on the place where the mallet will contact the ball. Do not use body movement in an effort to get more "oomph" into the shot, as it will almost inevitably reduce, instead of increasing, the force transmitted to the balls; and will often result in a complete mishit.

THE PASS ROLL

In the pass roll the striker's ball is made to travel FURTHER than the roqueted ball.

1. It should be obvious that a pass roll is impossible if the two balls travel in exactly the same direction, as the striker's ball cannot physically pass through the roqueted ball, and neither can it be made to jump over it.

2. For this reason it is usual, after placing the striker's ball as for a normal roll, to stand even further forward and aim the swing a few degrees to one side of the line of centres of the two balls.

3. The bottom hand should be placed at the very bottom of the mallet shaft for this shot, as close as you can get it to the head of the mallet without actually touching it (which, of course, would be illegal). The other hand will also be well down the handle, so that the handle slopes forward at least as much as for a full roll, or even more so.

4. The grip must be very firm, and the mallet head must be moved forward with a pronounced BUT SMOOTH acceleration.

5. Many players obtain best results by hitting through the TOP HALF of the two balls, with very little backswing but an exaggerated (low) follow-through.

6. The shoulders must be kept still while the arms swing forward, with elbows beginning in a bent position and being straightened as both arms reach forward during the swing.

7. As for the full roll, practice from a position where the backswing is severely hampered is a useful way of learning and perfecting the required technique.

8. Some players use an alternative method of hitting sharply downward on the striker's ball (rather than forward through the top half) and combining this with a noticeable forward rotation of the TOP of the mallet handle, to increase the forward squeezing effect. This will often cause the striker's ball to jump, which is not necessarily a bad thing; but it seems to work better when the balls are made to travel in two quite different directions rather than in almost the same direction.

9. In order to retain some control of direction it is important to ensure (as far as possible) that the follow-through is in a straight line and the mallet handle is not tilted to one side during the swing.

THE SPLIT SHOT

This is similar to one of the previously considered croquet shots (stop-shot, drive, half-roll, three-quarter roll, full roll, or pass roll), with the important difference that the two balls may need to be sent in entirely different directions.

1. Place your striker's ball against the roqueted ball so that the line of centres points to exactly where you want the ROQUETED ball to go. (Or just 'outside' this point to allow for 'pull' as explained below.)

2. Look at the two places where you want the balls to finish, and consider the distance you want the roqueted ball to travel. Estimate the FRACTION of this distance (though in a different direction) to be travelled by the striker's ball, and grip your mallet accordingly (i.e. as for a stop-shot, drive, half-roll, etc.).

3. If the angle of split (between the two directions the balls will travel in) is less than 30 degrees, retain this grip; but if the angle is 30-60 degrees you will need to move your hands up the handle a bit and/or stand further back from the ball. This lessens the forward mallet slope, as there is less need to 'squeeze' the striker's ball forward when the full weight of the roqueted ball is no longer directly in front of it preventing it from moving freely away.

If the angle of split is 60-80 degrees, you will need to move your hands up to near the top of the handle, and stand back as for a roquet or stop-shot. There is now very little or none of the roqueted ball in front of the striker's ball which can therefore move away freely in its required direction.

4. In a split shot, the friction between the two balls imparts a spin to each ball, causing them to deviate (or 'pull' - an overworked term in croquet) inwards as they slow down sufficiently to allow the spin to grip on the lawn surface. In a split shot approaching the full length or width of the lawn this 'pull' will commonly cause the balls to curve inwards towards each other, finishing about a yard inside the points where it was envisaged they would finish if no allowance for this 'pull' had been made. To make allowance for 'pull', therefore, you should line up the centres of the balls about a yard OUTSIDE the point where you actually want the roqueted ball to finish. For a shorter split shot less allowance need be made.

5. Now select a point, as near as you can judge, which is HALFWAY between the two places where you want the balls to finish, then choose another point a little closer to where to want your striker's ball to go (about a yard closer in a full length split), and aim your swing at this second point. Swing your mallet straight through in this line confidently, resisting all temptation to curve the swing or turn your mallet face towards where you want your striker's ball to go. Most players find it difficult to get used to the idea of not hitting in the direction they want their own ball to travel; but there are two balls to be given EQUAL CONSIDERATION.

The reason for aiming slightly into the striker's ball instead of at the exact midway point is threefold:

Firstly, the striker's ball is usually more affected by spin (and therefore pull) than the roqueted ball.

Secondly, the striker's ball tends to slip a little on the surface of the other ball before it grips, especially in a wide-angle split.

Thirdly and most importantly, the follow-through of the mallet head affects the direction of the striker's ball, but not that of the roqueted ball.

This is true of all split shots, from stop-shots to pass rolls, though the amount of allowance that should be made will vary, depending on such things as the distances travelled by the balls, type of ball, type of lawn surface, and whether the balls are wet or dry, as well as the peculiarities of your swing and follow-through.

6. Most players find the wide-angled shots the most difficult to control, but for some reason they fail to practise them. Perhaps they fail to understand the need to adjust their stance and grip according to the angle of split.

7. Sometimes it is necessary or desirable to play a very sharp wide-angle stop-shot, in which your striker's ball travels a minimum distance in a direction almost at right-angles to the direction of the roqueted ball. This occurs, for example, when you have just made the sixth hoop without any useful rush, and want to send the roqueted ball to the eighth ('2-back') hoop while going to a ball near the seventh ('1-back') hoop.

The best way to play this shot is to grip the mallet firmly and hit the ball as close as possible to the right-hand edge of the mallet face, using the sharpest stop-shot action you can manage. In this way you will minimise the effect of the mallet following through (as it must to some small extent) and preventing the striker's ball from moving away immediately to the right.

8. Because of 'pull' (the English call it 'mallet drag') the maximum achievable angle of split is not 90 degrees, but about 80 degrees. In this case the normal roquet-type swing and follow-through will cause the two balls to travel approximately equal distances. If you want your striker's ball to travel less distance than the roqueted ball in such a wide-angled shot you will need to use a stop-shot action. Wide-angle stop-shots, together with pass-rolls, are renowned as the most difficult croquet shots to control accurately; but if mastered they can become invaluable.

9. The basic splits from hoop 1 to hoops 2 and 3 (a three-quarter roll, or just over), and from hoop 2 to hoops 3 and 4 (a wider angle, so grip as for a half-roll and stand further back) are essential in order to keep breaks going, and need constant practice.

10. It is also important to learn to adjust these basic shots when the ball you are going to is not exactly placed just in front of your next hoop, or if you are not achieving the desired result.

For example, suppose that you have just made hoop 1, and wish to split the croqueted ball to hoop 3 while your striker's ball goes to a ball near hoop 2.

If the ball you are going to is a yard to the right of hoop 2, you will need your striker's ball to finish TWO YARDS to the right of the hoop in order to obtain a rush. Thus your half-way point and aiming point will be adjusted about a yard to the right. Similarly, if the ball you are going to is a yard to the left of hoop 2, you will need to adjust your aiming point correspondingly to the left.

If the ball is behind hoop 2, the distance your ball needs to travel will be increased, so you will have to stand further forward and move your hands further down the handle to get more slope on the mallet and squeeze the striker's ball further forward; or else use an accelerated 'push'. If the ball is, say, 3-4 yards in front of hoop 2 you will not want your ball to travel so far, so you should stand back slightly and move your hands upward on the handle to reduce its forward slope.

If your split shots are having unsatisfactory results, first check your technique to see whether you are correctly playing the required half-roll or three-quarter roll (etc.) Then if, say, the striker's ball is consistently falling short of its objective (or the roqueted ball is going too far), move your hands down the handle and stand further forward to increase both the slope of the handle and the fractional distance travelled by the striker's ball. An understanding of the mechanics of the split shot (technique and reasons for it) will enable you to correct other errors similarly.

11. COACHING HINT:

Some players have found it helpful to remember the following mnemonic for split shots, using the letters of the word **GRADE**:

Grip the mallet with hand positions determined from the

Ratio of the distances you wish the balls to travel.

Aadjust hands upward if the angle of split is wide.

Direct the swing at (approx.) the midway point.

Errors must be noted and corrected for future shots.

THE APPROACH SHOT

This is the shot in which the striker's ball is placed in position to run its hoop, while the roqueted ball is placed where it can be used after the hoop has been made. The shot used will be one of the croquet shots we have already considered (a take-off, stop-shot, drive, half-roll, three-quarter roll, full roll, pass roll, or most often some sort of split shot). All of these need to be mastered before you can expect to be able to play the correct (i.e. the best possible) approach shot in any given situation. Some additional considerations are worthy of mention:

1. In most cases distances of only a few yards will be involved. This may lead to the false assumption that approach shots should not present much difficulty. However, a high degree of accuracy is required, and any error will usually have severe consequences.

2. First, decide where you would like (ideally) both balls to go. This means that your striker's ball will go into position to run its hoop, and the roqueted ball will be positioned so that after running the hoop you will have a good chance of being able to not only roquet it, but rush it to where you want to go.

3. The ideal position for most approach shots will be to place the striker's ball 1-2 feet in front of the hoop and the roqueted ball 2-3 yards behind it, possibly a little to one side to allow a rush in some desired direction,

4. Look carefully at the distances the two balls will have to travel to get to these positions, and at the angle between the two directions. Decide whether such a shot is possible, and if so, which of the croquet shots will be needed. Many learners find this difficult. The small distances are deceptive and the hoop is a distraction, causing them to (say) use a stop-shot action when a half-roll was needed, or vice-versa.

5. Assess the difficulty of the required shot, and also how confident you are of being able to play it accurately. If you are not confident, then settle for some less than ideal placement of the roqueted ball which can be achieved by a shot you can play with greater confidence. Your overwhelming desire, of course, should be to reach the stage of proficiency where you can play all such shots with equal and utmost confidence.

6. If you are playing the approach shot from further back (e.g. 4-5 yards instead of 1-2 yards) then you will usually need to be content to place your striker's ball 3-4 feet in front of the hoop rather than 1-2 feet, to allow a greater margin of error while still retaining a reasonable chance of making the hoop. This means that the hoop shot will be played more firmly and the ball may well run further after passing through the hoop, so the roqueted ball should also be placed further from the hoop than in a shorter approach shot.

7. Because a longer approach shot requires that BOTH balls be placed further from the hoop, the point of aim for most approach shots (approximately halfway between where you want the balls to finish) varies very little. For almost all approach shots up to 4 yards from the hoop, you should aim at a point 1-2 feet behind the hoop. Swing through straight in this direction. Do not swing in a curve or turn your mallet face in an attempt to 'shepherd' your ball into better position, as this will lose your control of the other ball.

8. For approach shots involving half-rolls or three-quarter rolls, the 'forward slope and downward hit' method has a considerable advantage as compared with 'pushing through the bottom'. It allows better control of the striker's ball and easier adjustment to the speed of the lawn, as no timing is involved. Almost all leading players use this method, at least for approach shots; and most even prefer not to use a short drive as an approach shot, replacing it with a type of downward hit stop-shot referred to as a 'stab-roll'.

9. Remember to allow for such things as wideness of angle, pull, type of balls, and speed of lawn which may vary from hoop to hoop. In a short approach shot these things are no less important than in a long split shot.

10. In general, it is undesirable to hit the roqueted ball across the face of the hoop in an approach shot, or to take off from the 'inside' of a ball behind the hoop. In both of these cases the 'pull' on your striker's ball will tend to take it away from a line directly in front of the hoop, rather than along it. Because of this your margin for error will be reduced.

11. There is much more to learn about special types of approach shot, e.g. from very close to the hoop where the hoop itself may interfere with the shot, or from further away when allowance may have to be made for the possibility that the intended hoop shot may turn out to be impossible or too risky. Such finer points involve more than technique, and are beyond the scope of these present notes.

Author's note:

This booklet was my first effort, and was written several years ago. Since then, some new coaching ideas have been developed. In those days I was using the "Circle Method" for hoop approaches, but did not have the confidence to teach it or recommend it to anyone else. Instead, I regarded it as something unlikely to be of help to anyone but me. Every coach should be wary about teaching things which he has found helpful himself, but which are not used by other players, especially those playing at the top level.

Since then, however, both the SACA and the ACA have investigated the "Circle Method" and have adopted it as their officially recommended way of playing and teaching hoop approaches; and some of our leading players are now using the method very successfully.

Therefore, I am now including here the following two additional pages which are copied from my latest booklet "Croquet: Finer Points". They explain the method in reasonable detail, and most players will find the method far easier to learn and play consistently than the alternative wide variety of strokes which can be used in hoop approaches as explained above.

CIRCLE METHOD FOR HOOP APPROACHES (part 1)

This method of lining up and playing hoop approaches was explained in my booklet "Croquet Coaching: Error Correction" and has been incorporated into the official course notes for the training of coaches.

In comparing the Circle Method with the standard method of playing and teaching hoop approaches, the following should be noted:

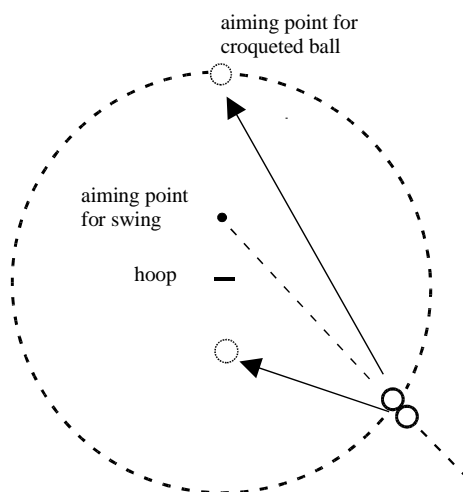
(1) The standard method involves deciding upon the desired finishing positions of the two balls (usually about two feet in front of the hoop and two yards behind it) and recognising the type of split shot which will be needed to get them to these positions. This could be a stop-shot, half roll, equal roll, pass roll, thick takeoff, (etc.), and the player then needs to know the correct grip, stance and type of swing he must use to play whichever of these shots is required. He must also be able to adjust the grip, stance and swing according to the wideness of the angle of split. Most of this is well beyond the understanding of many players, at least until they have been playing the game for some years. By this time they will often have developed the undesirable habit of playing most hoop approaches as take-offs, since it is the only method they can cope with.

(2) The Circle Method has the great advantage that it can be taught to a beginner right from the start, without the need for him to understand, or be able to play, any type of split shot or roll.

(3) It also has the advantage that it allows the player to develop a greater degree of consistency (and with it confidence) than any alternative method.

(4) A disadvantage is that the Circle Method will not always result in the player obtaining a forward rush in order to facilitate the continuance of his break. However, at an early stage of his development the difficulty in achieving accurate control of the timing of the more desirable stop-shot (when more or less directly in front of the hoop) may still mean that the Circle Method is a good option. At a later stage, when he can play stop-shots with accurate control of the striker's ball, he can vary his hoop approach method as he considers desirable. It is worth noting that several leading players are now using the Circle Method, sometimes with slight modifications, for almost all hoop approaches; and most of these find it so consistent that they will only vary it when the alternative shot involves no risk at all.

(5) The term "Circle Method" was coined in order to explain the method to coaches. It is not necessary for the player to think in terms of circles, but it is useful in teaching it for the coach to place markers around the hoop in a circle so that the learner can practise lining up the shot and playing it from various positions around the circle. The reason for this is that every position on the circle is the same distance from the hoop, so the player will use the same aiming points for both the croqueted ball and the line of swing; and these can be marked by the coach with small objects such as corner pegs as a guide for the player. The Method is described as follows: (see diagram)

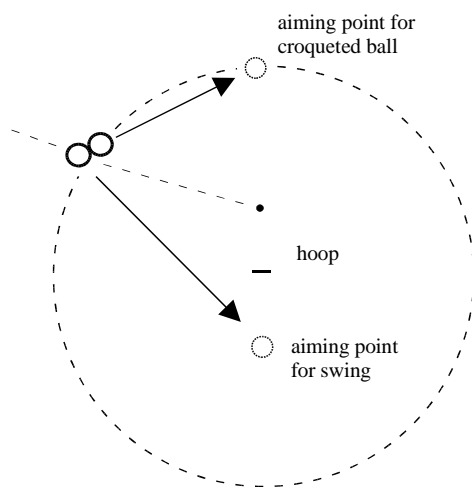


1. Observe the distance of the ball you have roqueted from the hoop (i.e. the approach distance).

2. Find a point on the lawn this same distance directly behind the hoop, and place your striker's ball against the roqueted ball in line with this point. That is, you are aiming the croqueted ball to go to the point you selected directly behind the hoop.

3. Find another point which is also directly behind the hoop, and about one-third of the way from the hoop to the first point you selected. This second point will be the aiming point for your swing. In playing the shot, you will 'stalk' this point, keep your mallet face square to it, and swing your mallet through directly in line with it, avoiding all temptation to "shepherd" the swing around toward the hoop. You will try to ignore the croqueted ball and swing as if you are hitting your striker's ball to make it roquet an imaginary ball at this second aiming point.

CIRCLE METHOD FOR HOOP APPROACHES (part 2)



4. The shot must be played with the mallet sloping forward, but only slightly, at an angle of about 15 degrees from the vertical. This degree of forward slope can be learnt with considerable accuracy over time, as it is exactly the same for every hoop approach using the Circle Method, whether you are approaching the hoop from in front, alongside, or behind as shown in the diagram at left.

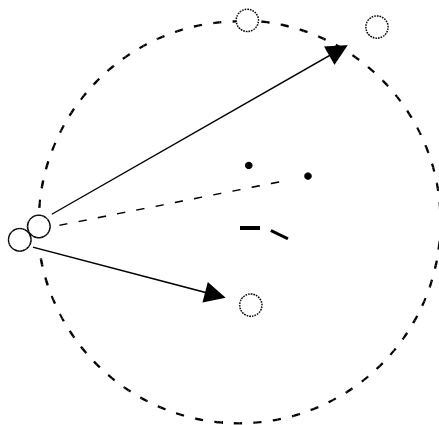
5. The swing is also the same, except for strength, for all positions around the circle. It is often referred to as a "stab-roll", but this is not an entirely accurate description. In this case the mallet should be neither stopped (decelerated) nor pushed forward (accelerated) as it contacts the ball. The player merely endeavours to maintain the movement (i.e. speed) of the falling mallet as it 'passes through' the ball. This takes some time to learn, but is actually easier for newcomers than for those who have developed the habit of "rolling" from such positions, or of "stabbing" at hoop approaches with a flat mallet.

6. The strength of the shot is the only thing that is not automatic and has to be judged for each separate hoop approach. However, the player will be helped if he realises that it is determined by the distance from the second aiming point, not his distance from the hoop. (In fact, about the same force is required as if he were hitting a single ball twice the distance to the second aiming point toward which he is swinging; and he should soon learn that less force is required as you move around the circle to a position behind the hoop, because you are then closer to the aiming point, which means that the total of the distances travelled by the two balls will be smaller.) The strength should be controlled by lifting the mallet back higher for a longer hoop approach, rather than by providing any force from the wrists or forearms. That is, you simply let the mallet 'fall' through the ball from a greater height, again maintaining its speed through the ball. This, also, allows the player to eventually achieve surprising consistency.

7. Another surprising aspect of the Circle method is that there seems to be a considerable margin for error. Even when the shot appears to have been somewhat mis-hit, the hoop is often still possible to make.

8. For a longer hoop approach the imaginary circle will be larger, and a higher backswing is needed, but otherwise the shot is played in exactly the same way. Note that (allowing for pull) the distance the striker's ball finishes in front of the hoop will be about the same as the distance from the hoop to the second aiming point, or about one-third of the circle radius. This means that in a longer hoop approach you will expect to finish further from the hoop, which maintains the margin for error. However, players

who use this method for hoop approaches of six yards or more (e.g. from the border near a hoop) may wish to slightly increase the forward slope of the mallet in order to achieve a narrower angle of split, so that the striker's ball finishes closer to the hoop.



9. At a later stage, when the player finds it desirable to not only make the hoop, but try for a rush in a particular direction after making it, he can do this by simply imagining the hoop in a slightly different position. This will, of course, alter the size of the circle (not shown in the diagram at left) and the positions of the two aiming points, and means that the shot will need to be hit a little harder or softer, depending on whether the rush and imaginary hoop movement are to the far side or the near side of the hoop.

CONCLUSION

1. Expertise at croquet cannot be reduced to a matter of simply knowing the best technique for each shot. KNOWING and DOING are two very different things, but players who make the effort to find out and understand the correct technique should at least stand a better chance than most of being able to decide what is causing errors, and how to set about correcting them. They will also be in a position of being able to assist others with sound advice. Their reward will be a greater consistency, so that they seldom play badly; and also play well after having been away from the game for some time.

2. The extent to which the correct technique can be successfully applied will depend on the player's straightness of eye (to some of us things appear to be in line when they are not), co-ordination, timing, judgement, concentration and temperament. The old adage that 'practice makes perfect' seems to apply less in croquet than in many other sports. The importance of regularly practising particular shots cannot be denied, but simply playing game after game may not bring about any improvement. In fact, if poor technique is being used you may be developing bad habits which will make it harder to progress than if you had not been playing at all.

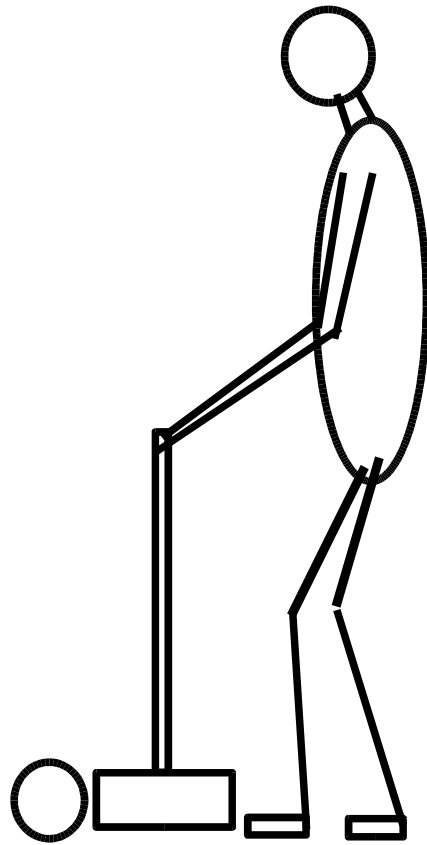
3. If you do decide to play practice games, and are serious about improving your game, then make most of the games serious contests in which your determination to win is as great as in any match or tournament game. Do not play shots carelessly or give only token thought to correct tactics "because it's only a practice game". Play only the shots that you would play in a tournament game, so that you develop the confidence to play them under pressure. Technique which is faultless when the player is relaxed can suddenly collapse under pressure, so it is essential to practise playing the shots under pressure.

4. Whether in a match or at practice, take sufficient time to consider carefully which shot should be played, and then the points of technique you need to get right. Refuse to allow anyone to hurry you in any way. A player who tries to pressure the opponent into playing hurriedly is at the very least displaying ignorance of the vast number of things that need to be thought through in relation to both tactics and technique, especially in a tense situation approaching the end of the allocated time for the game.

5. Lastly, if you have found these notes helpful, tell others about them, as a widespread interest in improving technique can only be good for the game. Be wary, however, of lending them your copy, since you will need it yourself to refer to whenever things start to go wrong, which for most of us is all too often.

Digital edition v1.2 2004 by cleinedesign.
email jballant@smartchat.net.au

CROQUET TECHNIQUE



by John Riches

The cover on the preceding page can be printed on green card to allow binding of the complete booklet. John Riches did it this way in the days before cheap colour printers.