

THE CROQUET GAZETTE

ISSUE 308

APRIL 2007



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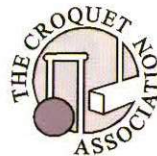
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Both black and white and coloured prints or photographs can be used. Slides are no longer acceptable. Photocopies of pictures or print outs of digital images cannot be accepted. If using digital photography please send in jpeg or tiff format files. Please accompany all images with a description of the subject of the picture. If you require any material to be returned please enclose a SAE. Tournament Reports & Results Emailed reports are welcomed. Attachments may be sent in Microsoft Word format, text format. Handwritten reports are no longer acceptable due to the illegibility of most. Queries regarding the delivery of the Gazette to members should be directed to the Secretary of the Croquet Association and not to the Editor.

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THE CROQUET ASSOCIATION WEB
SITE @
<http://www.croquet.org.uk/>

THE CROQUET GAZETTE **Chairman's Column**

Issue 308 April 2007

Front Cover:

Top: Graham Roberts, Phil Cordingley, Keith Aiton, Chris Williams and Sue Edwards at the CA Stand

Bottom: Klim Seabright and Graham Roberts reckon the going is good to soft at the Cheltenham Race Course Court

Next Issue Published 14th June 2007

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Photos in this issue by Ray Mountfield, Justin Brightmore, George Latham, James Hawkins, Klim Seabright, Gordon Weir, Lionel Tibble, Charles Waterfield

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By the time you receive this edition of the Gazette the new season will be well under way. As a prelude, the CA, with considerable help from Cheltenham Croquet Club, organised a PR initiative at the Cheltenham Gold Cup meeting. Whilst Channel 4 were somewhat scathing about our sport, we received good publicity from Radio 5's John Inverdale plus several press releases in the national and local press.

Meanwhile ITV spent the morning filming croquet at the Cheltenham Club for broadcasting in their evening news programme.

The MacRobertson Team's excellent victory in Australia has been honoured by the All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club inviting the whole team to attend Wimbledon this year.

Council have ratified many of the recommendations of a Working party looking at how we can best help to develop both Association and Golf Croquet. As a result of these recommendations the responsibility for Golf Croquet is being partially integrated into the existing CA Committee structure rather than being considered by a separate committee. Tournaments will continue to be run by separate committees for Association

Editorial

Here we are with the New season under way. In this and the previous issue I have been surprised to see that there have been no letters for publication. This is made all the more surprising by the fact that on the survey recently carried out by the CA, that letters were one of the items that is most popular to readers of the Gazette. So please let's see if we can have some letters for the next issue.

Given that at the start of the season players tend to be a little rusty, unless they are lucky enough to have access to clubs with winter lawns that are open, I have made coaching a priority in this issue. There are several items from several different sources, covering different aspects of play. I would like to thank those that provided them, and hope that you the players find them useful. I will continue to solicit material from players for coaching in future issues, both for Association and for Golf, but if you have

and Golf events but closer liaison will be implemented to try to reduce too many clashes in the fixtures book.

The working party have now moved on to consider initiatives that can ensure that Croquet continues to develop in all its forms, and what good practices exist at Club and federation level to assist this development.

The National Garden Croquet classic will be run again this year following its initial success in 2006. The CA is working on increasing the profile of Garden Croquet. Based on discussions with Croquet Set manufacturers there are well over 250,000 families with Garden Croquet sets. If we can tap into this market it offers considerable potential for new recruits for Croquet clubs throughout the country. I would urge all CA members to encourage any Garden Croquet players that they know to enter the local heats of the Garden Croquet Challenge this year and to see if we can then get them to join a local club.

Finally I am pleased to be able to announce that due to the healthy nature of the CA's finances we are proposing to hold individual and club subscriptions at their current level for 2008.

I hope you all have a most enjoyable season and that I will get the opportunity to meet many of you on my travels during the season.

Jonathan Isaacs



some tips or a practice routine that you think would be beneficial to other players please send it through to the Gazette, as I am sure players would appreciate the sharing of the vast experience and knowledge that exists both in this country and in others across the world.

I hope you all have an enjoyable season and look forward to receiving the reports of the very rich tournament programme.

Gail Curry
Editor**News & Information****National Garden Croquet Classic**

The Croquet Association announces that the National Garden Croquet Classic will run again this year after the successful event in 2006.

The competition will be held at weekends, in 3 rounds, local heats, a regional and then national final.

Venues for heats and regional finals are still being sought - particularly in the Yorkshire and South West Federation Areas.

The Final will be held on September 15th at Blewbury Croquet Club Oxfordshire. Winner and runner-up will receive the splendid croquet sets donated by Jaques the famous games manufacturer.

The competition is open to anyone who was not a member of a croquet club prior to the 1st October 2006 and who has never held an official croquet handicap.

The competition will be played according to the basic rules of Golf Croquet published by the Croquet Association at: http://www.croquet.org.uk/golf/basic_laws.html

All entries must reach us by 5pm on Thursday 31st May 2007.

The Entry Fee is £5 per competitor. Cheques should be made out to the Croquet Association.

Entries, including the entry fee, should be sent to:-

Mr D M Turner, 59 Kenton Lane, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE3 3BS email: davidmturmer@blueyonder.co.uk Tel: 0191 2841244

World Class Golf Croquet Coaching at Ripon & Roehampton

Three times World Champion and Professional Sports Coach, Khalid Younis (Egypt) will host a Golf Croquet Coaching Course at the Ripon Spa Hotel Croquet Club from Thursday 14th June to Sunday 17th June and anyone interested in receiving top class coaching in Golf Croquet can contact the hotel to book a place for one or more days.

Accommodation can be provided if required. If you would like more details about the coaching, phone Freda Vitty on 01388 720074 or email frevit@tesco.net

The Roehampton sessions are on Tuesday 19th and Wednesday 20th June 2007.

Split into Intermediate and Advanced levels, in groups of five to eight people, each session will run from 9.30 to 12.30 and 2.00 to 5.00. It may also be possible to arrange coaching on Wednesday evening 6.30 to 8.30 if there is any demand.

The cost of each session is £30 (GBP).

At this stage it has not been decided which sessions will be advanced and which intermediate.



Khalid Younis



Reg Bamford

If there is demand, coaching can be arranged for smaller groups or on an individual basis. The cost of individual coaching will be £60 (GBP) per hour.

On Tuesday evening there will be an Exhibition Match between Khalid Younis and current AC World Champion, Reg Bamford (South Africa). Starting at 6.00pm, there will be commentary on the match and comments from the players. An entry fee of £5 (GBP) will be made for non Roehampton Members to see this match.

It is expected that there will be a high level of interest and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis. All those interested in attending the coaching course(s) should contact WCF President, David Openshaw email david@open123.demon.co.uk or telephone The Games Manager at Roehampton 020 8480 4200.

Notice of Croquet Association AGM

At the next AGM, which will be held on Saturday 13th October, 5 members of Council will have completed their terms of office, of all whom have indicated their wish to stand for re-election.

The names of any other Associates who wish to stand for election to Council should be notified to the Secretary of the CA by 1st June 2007. In addition, it would be helpful if any notice of any motions to be put to the AGM could be given to the Secretary by that date.

Klim Seabright - Secretary of CA - The Croquet Association, c/o Cheltenham Croquet Club, Old Bath Road, Cheltenham, GL53 7DF Email - caoffice@croquet.org.uk

2nd Women's World Golf Croquet Championship

This event will be held at Carrickmines in Ireland 3rd-9th September 2007

The GC Selectors have met and the following players have been chosen from the list of those available to fill the three places at present offered.

Freda Vitty, Kath Burt and Julie Hudson.

The Selectors also nominated Jane Pringle and Irene Burns as first and second reserves and will recommend that they be considered for wild cards.

2007 Tournament Regulations Published

The 2007 CA Tournament Regulations have been published and take effect from 1st April. Changes have been made to clarify how byes should be placed within tournament draws (knockouts, draw and process and blocks) and to standardise on the Manager as the one who specifies hoop sizes. The aim has been to remove ambiguity, and provide further guidance to managers, rather than to change the intent of these regulations. The regulations can be found on the CA website at <http://www.croquet.org.uk/tournament/>

Clarification Club Refund Scheme

Iwould like to clarify two matters in relation to the £10 Club refund scheme.

It is **not** mandatory that new members sign up to the Direct Debit payment scheme. Members who do sign up to the DD scheme do of course pay less.

The Club will be sent their money in December 2007 - not

as and when each person joins. I will send each club a statement listing those members who have listed the club as their first named club and an appropriate cheque. Clubs can then reconcile the list with their understanding of those who have joined, and come back to me with any queries they may have.

I hope that clarifies the operation of the scheme, but do give me a call if you have any questions
Klim Seabright - Secretary of CA

CA appoints new Child Protection Officer

Pam Mason has been appointed Child Protection Officer for the Croquet Association having now taken over from Bob Whittaker. Our thanks go to Bob for the excellent work he has done whilst filling this post. Her role is in an advisory capacity to assist clubs or federations with any Child Protection Issues.

If any clubs or federations needs advice, Pam can be contacted on Tel: 01273 503527 or email pamela@waylands57.wanadoo.co.uk

Lawn care machinery for sale

Bristol Croquet club has some surplus (superior, but old) machinery for sale.

Contact Anthony Camacho if interested (acam@blueyonder.co.uk or 0117 973 0036)

- Two mowers:
- Atco Club B20 deluxe No 019207/M with grass box
 - Allett 20" Tournament Serial 120720/20 with grass box
 - Isis SUPATURFMAN tining machine with hollow, solid and splitting tines and brush
 - Scarifier with collection box (bought from Bristol Parks department some years ago) (not recently run)

Obituaries

Pat Hampson

Visitors and friends of Hunstanton Croquet Club will be saddened to hear that Pat died in February after a stroke. Pat and her sister Sarah kept the club going through difficult times and much of the club's current strength and success is due to them. Pat will be greatly missed.

George Noble

Faith Fewtrell

Faith died on 13th September 2006, after a characteristically courageous battle with Motor Neurone Disease.

Faith was someone who always faced any challenge head-on, and her attitude to her illness was no exception. She refused to indulge in any self-pity or complaint, instead busying herself working with Lord Joffe on his proposed changes to the Right to Die legislation. She visited him in the House of Lords and recorded a video diary that detailed her experiences of MND.

After her husband Bob died very suddenly in May, Faith was left requiring 24 hour support. Fortunately she was able to stay in their lovely home on the Isle of Wight, spending just one night in a hospice. Her son Chris was walking with Faith round her garden the day before she died.

Faith and Bob were two of the most energetic, adventurous and fun people one could ever wish to meet. They were also absolutely devoted to each other. Their friends in the croquet world will remember them with enormous affection.

Simon Tuke



Jim Martin - Preston CC

It is with great sadness that I write of the death of Jim Martin on 5th December 2006.

Jim joined Preston (Brighton) Croquet Club in 1988, a year after he retired as a fund manager and Director of Rowan Investment Mangement Services.

Jim was a great asset to Preston and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. He was Chairman for two years and Secretary 2005-6. Nothing was too much trouble for Jim.

He contributed to the life of the club with enthusiasm, whether it was coaching, refereeing, managing tournaments or more mundane tasks such as watering the courts or removing worm casts.

He was a great competitor and loved both Association and Golf Croquet, playing to a high standard despite the disability in his hip.

He was a remarkable man whose dry humour brightened all those around him.

He married Deirdre in 1955, shortly before moving to Brighton, where in 1964 he helped to establish the Buddhist Society of Brighton. He leaves two daughters, four foster sons and nine grandchildren.

Rosemary Faulkner

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John Hobbs, Lewins, Mayfield Road, Rotherfield, E. Sussex TN6 3LS
 Tel: 01892 852072 email Hobbsmall@aol.com

East Midlands Federation 7th Annual Astroturf Golf Croquet Competition

Report by Ray Mountfield

The day dawned bright and clear – amazingly, since this tournament has previously been played in horizontal sleet, gale force winds and snow (see last April's front cover of The Gazette)! At 11am we were waiting impatiently for the junior hockey players to vacate the Astroturf at Shobnall Leisure Centre in Burton on Trent. Then willing hands hammered in hoops, pegs and boundary strings for four full-sized courts (measuring out had been done two days before).



Tim King, Andrew King and Jane Penn-Davis during play at Shobnall

This year the event, which is sponsored by Coors, proved more popular than ever with teams from five EMF clubs taking part. Unfortunately some late applicants couldn't be accommodated, but 24 players in eight teams contested the main event. Playing experience ranged from first season to international level and three juniors were included.

Play started in two blocks

Block A Ashby Juniors
 North Hykeham
 Woodhall Spa
 Ashby PD+1

Block B Ashby Seniors
 Bakewell
 NH/WS
 Southwell

After five rounds the top two placings from each block, the two Ashby teams from A and Ashby Seniors and Southwell from B, went on to contest the team event for the Bass Shield. After five more closely fought rounds Ashby Seniors emerged as clear winners. There was little between the other places, but Southwell narrowly edged into second spot.

The Coors Cup for highest placed individual was taken by Christine Mounfield with five wins and one draw. Tim Robson and Noel Penn-Davis each had five wins but Tim's better hoop difference put him into runner-up position.

For anyone eager to play when grass courts are out of action, we can thoroughly recommend an Astroturf experience. The surface plays differently, obviously, but the basic techniques are

the same. All you need are a peg, balls and a set of hoops (ours were made by our friendly neighbourhood blacksmith) some six-inch nails and an obliging Sports Centre!

No Buckets and Spades Packed for this Seaside Trip

Bury Croquet Clubs visit to Cober Hill

Report by Justin Brightmore

On the 16th March 2007, with cars laden down with hoops, balls and mallets, members of Bury Croquet Club set off across the Pennines from Bury for Cloughton, Near Scarborough. We were headed for Cober Hill Guest House and Conference Centre (featured in the letters December Gazette). The party was headed by Dave Barrett, a visitor to Cober Hill for many years, his aim "to give Bury Players the true feel of Cober" and to demonstrate what this holiday venue had to offer.



Alison and Justin Brightmore were recruited to host this weekend, to help to transfer the atmosphere of Cober. They host two one week holidays during the summer season at Cober Hill and also the Christmas and New Year holidays. The remaining four croquet playing "Coberites" to help Dave achieve his ambition were Linda and Richard Wheatley and Mags and John Crossland (unfortunately Linda and Richard had to cancel at the last minute due to ill health).

The twenty five holiday-makers arrived throughout the day on Friday, the Coberites setting off as early as possible to maximise their exposure to the spirit of Cober. Some of the early arrivals took the opportunity to explore the numerous walks that are accessible from the hotel or stroll through the gardens; whilst others, more croquet die-hards set up the lawns and got on with the business at hand.

Dave, Alison and Justin had identified four potential lawns that could be used to play croquet. The lawns for the tournaments would be two "short" lawns made by dividing the main croquet lawn at Cober in half. A full lawn was set up on the bowling green and a fourth lawn was set up on the putting green which to every ones surprise was perfectly playable but added a new challenge, to the game making hiding from opponents slightly easier.

The ambitious goal for the weekend (this was March after all) was to play three knockout tournaments and provide all those that wanted to play ample opportunity to do so. The tournament schedule was golf doubles Saturday am, Short Lawn alternate shot doubles Saturday afternoon and Cober rules croquet on Sunday. The evenings were filled with a quiz, a whist drive, a concert (we have some budding thespians at Bury) and a sequence dance and social. The Brightmores had joked with Dave that he was trying to pack a week's holiday entertainment into three days; he seemed to just acknowledge this as quite acceptable. It's Cober tradition to keep people busy if they want to be or allow them to just relax, Alison and Justin seemed fully aware of this and provided ample opportunity for both. It has been said in the past by a Cober guest of many years "if you could bottle the spirit of Cober you could be a millionaire".

The weather was kind to us on Saturday although the wind did start to blow with some ferocity towards afternoon tea, Sunday was very blustery and cold, but nothing stopped play, Justin even commented that he had now played in all weathers at Cober, adding a snow storm to his list this weekend!

Croquet aside, Cober served us very well in every respect, fantastic food, comfortable accommodation and gardens and lawns better than we could have imagined.

Dave's ambition has been met; we had a successful weekend's croquet and all Cober has to offer has been well and truly experienced. A great start to the season and we all look forward to another Cober weekend next year.

Obituary

DIANA BROTHERS

Sussex County Croquet Club has lost one of its most stalwart members following the sudden death of Diana on the 10th March 2007. It was entirely unexpected by members since she had taken part in several of the winter activities, including the Winter Working Party on Tuesday mornings and social events such as Sunday luncheons, Scrabble and Bridge. She had recently organised an afternoon of scrabble and set up a duplicate bridge tournament for the week after she died.

She had been a member of Sussex County for 20 years having previously played at Rottingdean where she retained dual membership for some years. She came from a Croquet family in that both her parents had been very keen members at Compton.

Diana as a player was very determined and competitive, playing for the Club teams and in Tournaments for many years, a particular favourite being the Veterans' Championships in which she played at both Southwick and Budleigh.

Within a couple of years of joining the Club she had been elected to the committee and then soon becoming Club Secretary, spending six years in that role and ably taking on far more

responsibility than she had expected, with her chairman having to spend much time in London.

At that time she moved from Rottingdean to live very near to the Club, allowing her to keep an ever-watchful eye on the premises and all that went on within, which she did.

In the early 1990's when the Club was considering selling land to maintain solvency and seeking more capital, she was one of only two takers to take up the offer of purchased life membership. In spite of life membership, she had in recent years contributed in kind, with several generous gifts including a new large kitchen cooker and much garden furniture.

After six years as Secretary she remained on the committee for five more years, taking on the job of Membership Secretary where she introduced our "New Members' Package". This allows newcomers an extended time to get to know the game and the Club, before joining. Each year this procedure has been responsible for a maintained level of new members at the start of each season.



Diana Brothers in play at Southwick

Conscious of the need to retain newcomers who were unable to enter the normal range of competitions and to integrate into the Club those members in employment, she organised special competitions at weekends, where she provided teas and a trophy.

She also took on overall supervision of all aspects of Golf Croquet. This involved two weekly afternoon sessions when six or more lawns were devoted to Golf with over 40 players taking part in organised doubles. She also organised the Club Golf Croquet competitions and league teams to the extent that the numbers involved almost matched those of Association Croquet. She retained this role to the day she died.

She was awarded a well-deserved CA Diploma in 2005 for the tremendous amount of work she had done and continued to do. In addition to the foregoing, she organised teas for our numerous tournaments by providing home-made products and baking a prolific number of cakes throughout each season. This was particularly onerous at the Inter-Counties Championships.

Although she was a somewhat shy, quiet and reserved lady, if she saw anything going wrong or an action detrimental to the club in any respect she bravely did something about it. She certainly held Croquet and the Club so close to her heart that her contribution was unique and those who knew her will testify to her commitment, kindness and generosity.

Bryan Teague

Handicap Association Coaching

By James Hawkins

Lesson 5: Major Surgery

Now that Spring is here, it's time to cast your mind back to the end of last season, and Lesson Four in this series (*Issue 304*). In that lesson, I talked about how to rescue a poor pioneer: shove more and more balls in the direction of the next hoop, until one of them provides you with a good enough opportunity of continuing the break. Nine times out of ten this will let you keep going, and it's possible to restore control with little hardship. Today's lesson is all about those moments when you've let things drift so badly that you need some major work to get the break back on track.

I'm going to refer back to a couple of the basic rules of thumb I introduced in Lesson One. Firstly, you want to keep the pivot ball (most of the time) within the rectangle bordered by the four outer hoops; and, secondly, you want to make sure the pivot is somewhere in front of your break, and (usually) somewhere within your normal field of vision.

For the time being, assume you've still got some semblance of a break – there is at least a ball at your next hoop. Your problem is that your pivot is way out of position. If that's the case, there's a limit on what you can actually do. Here are your choices:

Play on as if nothing is wrong. Leave the pivot where it is, and play a series of implausible, difficult shots to keep going;

Ignore the pivot altogether. Carry on with just three balls, in the hope of getting an easy opportunity to salvage the fourth ball later;

Play a clever shot to bring the pivot ball nearer the centre of action;

Swap the balls round (more of options 3 & 4 in a moment);

Take some bisques, and just stick everything immediately back as it should be.

Now look at those in more detail.

1 Genius or Idiot?

Diagrams 1a & 1b

You're playing Red. You've come through Hoop 2, there's a ball at Hoop 3, and your pivot ball is down near Hoop 1. So, you heave a ball to Hoop 4, stopping near the pivot; you take off all the way to Hoop 3; you heave back down to Hoop 5,

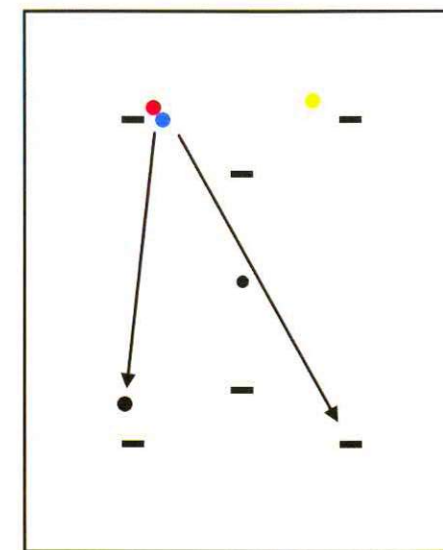


Diagram 1a

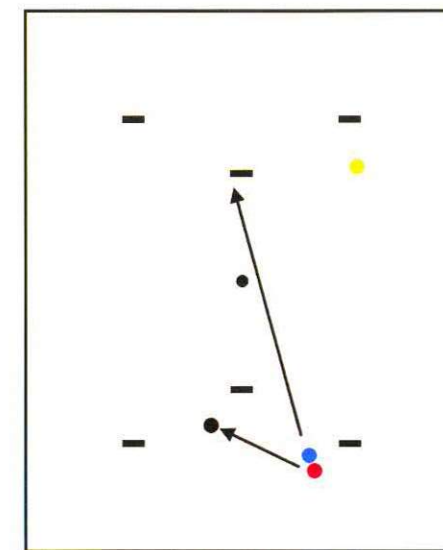


Diagram 2a

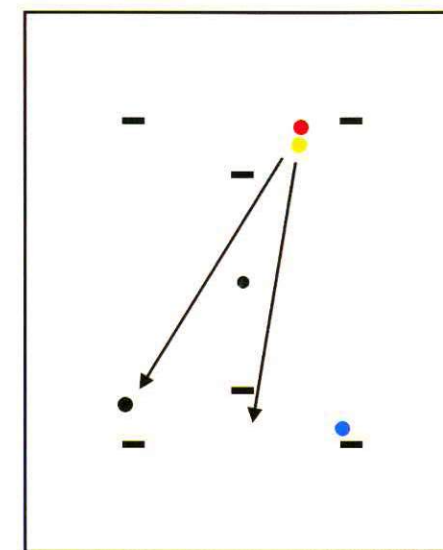


Diagram 1b

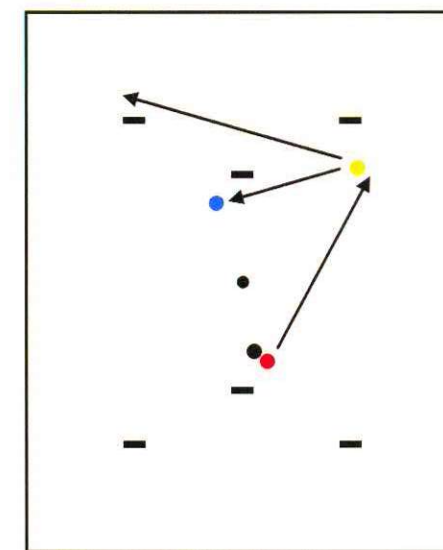


Diagram 2b

and so on. Maybe there's a clever reason for doing this, but I can't think what. The pivot is there solely to make all your shots easier. If it's harder to use it than to ignore it, don't even think about that outlandish 30-yard full roll.

2 Bide your time

Suggesting that you should ignore a ball isn't just adopting an ostrich mentality. There are often times when it's best to leave well alone. This is best shown with an example.

Diagrams 2a & 2b

You're for Hoop 4, and have left a ball at Hoop 3. Come through Hoop 4, and send a ball to Hoop 6 as best you can. After 5, take off to the pivot (leaving the Hoop 5 ball behind). You can now get a ball at 6, a ball at 1-back, and a ball somewhere in front of you. Granted, it's not the greatest of pivots, but here's how to deal with improving it.

3 The backward rush

First of all, ask yourself what's wrong with having a pivot ball there. Try and answer this for yourself – set the position up on a lawn.

Diagram 3a & 3b

You're at Hoop 6, so run the hoop, hit blue, and try sending it to your next-but-one hoop. Unless you've a rush – any sort of rush to anywhere – you're faced with an almighty heave of a roll. Blue goes to 2-back, you go to the pivot, then take off back up the lawn to 1-back. After 1-back, you've another heave, sending yellow to 3-back going to the pivot again. You're meant to be playing this game for fun, and you're not going to find much enjoyment with that sequence of shots.

The clue is in my analysis. You come out of Hoop 6, and you have to get a rush somewhere. The trick is to get that rush pointing somewhere behind you. If you can get Blue down to somewhere on a line with the peg, there's a shot you can play to 2-back and the pivot. The ideal spot is probably

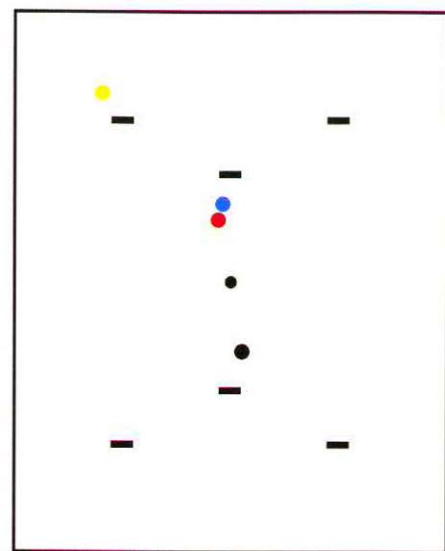


Diagram 3a

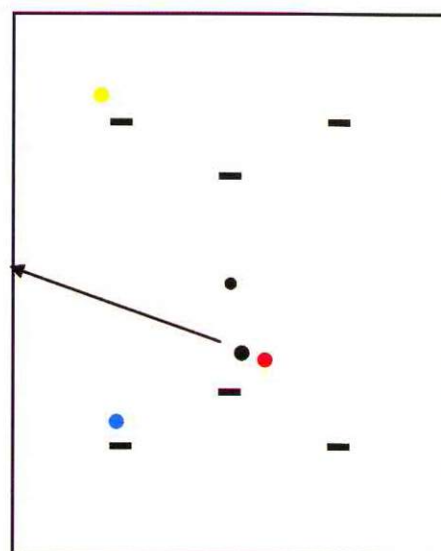


Diagram 4a

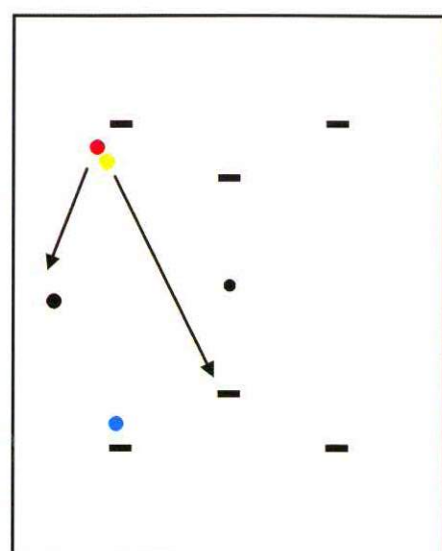


Diagram 4c

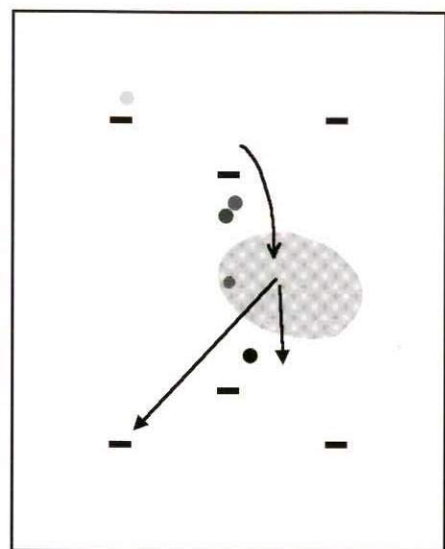


Diagram 3b

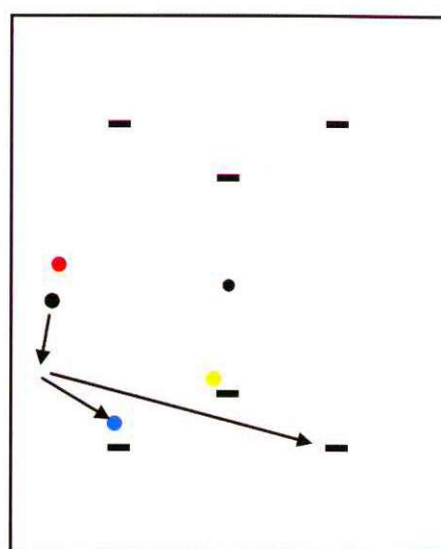


Diagram 4b

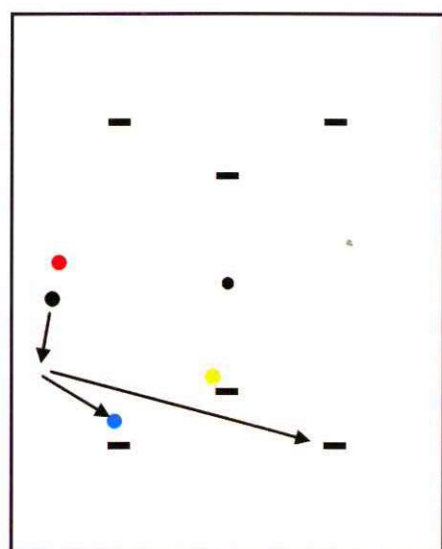


Diagram 4d

a couple of yards to the right of the Black. So, to recap: leave Blue a bit short as you approach Hoop 6, run the hoop, rush Blue back wide of Hoop 5, stop-shot it to 2-back and rush Black a bit north-west of the peg. 4 Swapping pivots

Let's fast-forward ten seconds. My last shot was to rush Black a little bit beyond the peg. Let's suppose I overhit the rush. A lot. By about, say, 15 yards.

Diagram 4a & 4b

I shake my head, swallow hard, and take off to Yellow to make 1-back. Even with the best stop-shot in the world, there's no way I'm sending Yellow anywhere near 3-back whilst finishing in hitting distance of Black. Change of plan: send Black as the next pioneer, and make Yellow the pivot ball.

Diagram 4c & 4d

The course of action starts a bit like the last example. Instead of setting up a rush pointing backwards, try to approach 1-back

so you can rush Yellow off the west boundary. You can then play a stop-shot putting it into play (towards Hoop 5 or the peg), and hopefully land short of Black. Rush Black southwards a bit, and you've got a playable drive to send it to 3-back.

5 Throw some bisques at the problem

Five lessons into a course on handicap croquet, and this is the first time I've mentioned bisques. Use them if you must, but don't let me see you. My ethos in these lessons has been to encourage some creative problem-solving with your break play. Often, with a bit of forethought, you can see difficulties arising before it's too late. Once you can do that regularly, you'll find that you'll need to rely on those bisques less and less. In the sixth and final lesson, I'll philosophise more about such matters.

Victorian Croquet Centre Clubhouse Finished In Australia

Report by George Latham,
Hon Secretary, Croquet Victoria

Croquet Victoria has moved into its new Croquet Centre clubhouse at last. The Centre has taken five years from concept to reality.

The Association owned the previous headquarters in the affluent suburb of Brighton in Melbourne Australia, so officials decided that rather than be cash poor and asset rich, it was time to sell the five-court venue to become an Association that would be financially secure forever and have a modern headquarters.

Today, Croquet Victoria still owns its own land in the beautiful landscaped estate in the western Melbourne suburb of Cairnlea, has built a modern 12-court, croquet-specific Centre and invested enough funds to secure its financial future. The new Centre is situated near the Western Ring Road 15 mins from Melbourne Airport and is more accessible for the majority of players in the State of Victoria who can reach Cairnlea without having to travel through the city.

Croquet in Victoria has been community based since 1914 when townspeople tired of waiting for an invitation to wealthy estates and approached local municipal councils to provide venues for croquet as well as for tennis, lawn bowls, cricket and football. Croquet Victoria is a not-for-profit incorporated Sporting Association run by volunteers with 2,500 players who belong to 92 clubs throughout Victoria. The Association administers a range of services to these clubs through volunteer committees that train coaches, referees and tournament managers; run membership programs funded by government agencies; coordinate Association, Gateball and Golf Croquet activities; run state championships and assist clubs in promoting the game in their community.

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The Victorian Croquet Centre at Cairnlea will be used for the same activities as at North Brighton. However, unlike Brighton, the disabled will have access to every part of the property and the clubhouse has been purposely designed with multiple rooms to cater for more than one activity at a time. Croquet events can proceed without interruption from meetings, conferences and a range of community activities; and players have lockers, showers and a bar as welcome additions.

Professional Help For Volunteers

Even though Croquet Victoria has been successfully run by volunteers since 1914 and owned its own headquarters since 1948, we recognised we didn't have anywhere near the expertise to manage the sale of one venue, the purchase and construction of a

new one, and manage a substantial investment of capital. However, the State Government of Victoria has three government bodies under the Minister of Sport and the Minister of Health - VicSport, Sport and Recreation Victoria and VicHealth - whose aim is to support all State

Sporting Associations financially and with professional advice. CEO's and consultants from these three organisations have guided us and referred us to appropriate professionals in developing and completing this project. They are now continuing to see that we follow best practice in setting up a professional business and marketing program that will eventually have paid professionals assisting our volunteer administration in all aspects of croquet in the state.

Clubs Will Benefit

The 92 clubs in the 13 regions of the state are the core of croquet in Victoria and the Croquet Victoria administration exists to support and service these clubs. Clubs voted for the sale, relocation and financial investment on the understanding that once the new Centre is established, covering costs and generating profits, the interest from the investment will go towards projects that support and assist our clubs. Until then clubs that are prepared to



Interior can be divided with foldaway soundproof wall to create a function area and club lounge with bar.

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put in the effort have \$55,000 of government grants in addition to member funds for projects that increase membership of clubs, subsidise advertisements and fund free professional advice on croquet Court maintenance.

Frustrating Delay In Grass Growing

Our harsh summer and water restrictions influenced us to have Santa Ana couch grass that uses a minimum of water and is less prone to disease. Unfortunately the Santa Ana couch grass ran out of hot weather due to the delay in the construction of the roads and their attendant services. This has meant waiting for our next summer for the full coverage necessary for top class tournaments – March 2007 being the projected date. Luckily, the contract of sale on the old headquarters allows us to occupy that venue until our new courts are ready. In the meantime three courts



Views from the Clubhouse overlooking the courts

at the Centre have been sown with a grass mix that is growing rapidly and will be ready for play in October. This will allow us to offer the surrounding communities not only a for-hire venue for meetings and conferences, but also croquet courts to start our VicHealth funded Corporate, Business and Community Croquet Participation Program and our Sport & Recreation Victoria funded School Croquet Program in the area and attract members to a new Croquet Club.

Each of the 12 courts has 2m extra beyond each boundary; a perimeter walkway and two centre walkways raised 11cm above court level surrounds all courts; and concrete kerbing covered with artificial turf will act as barriers to protect players and spectators from croquet balls. The shelters on the walkways have retractable canvas awnings and toughened glass sides to protect players from the weather and permit maximum viewing from the shelters. Court equipment will be housed in lockers in the shelters.

Rooms With A View

The outstanding feature of the clubhouse is the maximum view of the courts. Learning from the restricted viewing from the old headquarters, we decided on floor to ceiling windows facing all courts and having the main veranda facing the courts below the floor level of the clubhouse so those sitting outside would not block the view from inside. You can stand at the bar and see all courts except half of each court beside the clubhouse. The same applies to the Manager's office. From the upstairs balcony overlooking the courts you can see all but the two courts beside the clubhouse.

Live-In Caretaker

Frank and Iris Williams, leading club members of the successful Horsham Croquet Club, have just moved into the modern one-bedroom caretaker flat upstairs. Having enthusiastic, experienced club members on site is a huge advantage for coordinating activities and developing community contacts.

Patience Will Be Rewarded

The work involved in getting the new Centre built and operational, and the frustration of delays beyond our control, have taught us to be patient and work steadily at getting everything right. So far we have succeeded financially and operationally and our experienced advisors are assuring us that the Centre will be a big success if we keep continuing to improve our organisation



and adhere to sound professional advice.

Croquet Victoria looks forward to welcoming you to our new Victorian Croquet Centre in the near future.

The Liverpool Project – Part 3

By James Hawkins

Parts 1 & 2 of this story were published in issues 303 June 2006 and 304 August 2006.

A year has passed since I received the thumbs-up from Liverpool City Council to set up a croquet club in Clarke Gardens. Here in southern suburbia, the park, including its derelict kiddies' pet zoo, has seen little activity for years. Apart from the occasional dog-walker, no one seems to use its facilities. The zoo area is now overgrown and penned off with security fences. The last of the goats and donkeys were moved away five years ago. The guinea pigs are long dead, and wild foxes are the only residents of the area. The several buildings on site – a 350-year old coach-house, stable block and walled garden, as well as a wooden prefab hut (circa 1995) – are showing signs of advanced neglect.

Given the choice, then, between (a) no park users and (b) a croquet club, Derek, my New Best Friend at the Council, has bent over backwards to accommodate my project. We shook hands on the project on a freezing morning in February 2006. Much was left unfinalised at that stage: I was given the impression that

maintenance and rent would be nominal charges, that I could use the nearby wooden hut for storage (once I'd removed the dried-on evidence of the nesting parrots who were its former occupants), and that I could take as much space on the old football pitch as I wanted for croquet lawns.

On the one hand, I have room to start playing croquet on six makeshift croquet lawns, with the potential to move into the walled garden and have access to another six. On the other hand, I have no money and no members. Still, Derek and I agree that 2006 will be a year to test the feasibility of getting the project moving.



The answer to storage problems

That was February. By the time everyone else was dusting down their mallets for last season's first tournament, I had a better indication of costs for use of the land:

Provisional rent for the site = £0

Maintenance cost = £0.

As Estate Manager for all of the city's (many) parks, Derek seems to have absolute authority to reallocate resources between one area and another. The current vogue for biodiversity allows for a meadow area alongside an intensively mown croquet lawn, without any effect on the total ground staff budget.

Where there has been an effect, and one to my detriment, is in the renegotiation of employment contracts. Liverpool City Council offered early retirement to many of its staff, and took on new recruits during the year. For reasons I don't fully understand, the departure of the ex-employees was in June, and the arrival of the newcomers wasn't until mid-October. From where I stand, I saw little real interruption in service; I'd turn up at the weekend, and someone would have done some cutting the previous day. Whether he was out there himself on a tractor, I don't know, but Derek resolved to continue the commitment to mowing and white-lining. It's not a precise cut at the moment, but I don't need anything too refined for this, Season Zero, my test year. If that's a skeleton service, I look forward to 2007 with some cautious optimism.

Taking on six lawns for a brand new club is clearly unmanageable. One full-sized lawn divided in two for beginners is plenty, so that's what I've had marked out. The surface isn't bad – like anywhere, there are a few hills, and the grass quality will need some work over the coming years. As a newly registered CA club, I've claimed the loan of a full set of equipment under the Development Committee's new scheme. I've borrowed a further set of hoops and balls from Southport. So, lawns acquired,

maintained and equipped for next to nothing. All is exactly as I anticipated.

Err, no. Just as I thought I was the only interested party for the use of Clarke Gardens, Derek and his colleagues were meeting with another organisation. Independent Living Association (ILA) is a local body catering for the needs of adults with learning disabilities. Looking for a centre in which to provide social support, employment and teaching of life-skills, they have their eye on taking occupancy of the old coach house and its surrounds.

It's funny how things turn out. Derek mentions my rival interest in the use of the site to Richard, who's leading ILA's proposed project. The next day, Richard emails me and asks to join my club. It turns out he was a keen garden player 30 years ago at college, and wants to resume his interest in croquet. Not for the first time, my modest plans have taken on a life of their own. Potentially, ILA has the resources to draw down several hundred thousand pounds to develop the buildings in the park. The croquet club would become an external community group sharing the use of their facilities and vice versa. I let his members have dedicated access to the lawns for golf croquet for a couple of mornings a week, and he lets my members use the toilets and the kettle in his new centre.

I'm placing quite an optimistic spin on the situation. Perhaps it's fair to do so. I could have found myself with either no competition for use of the park (a politically insecure position), or hostile competition (which would make life intolerable). In many ways, this seems, cautiously, to provide perhaps the best possible fit. Only time will tell how our relationship plays out.

I've been taken aback by the emergence of new recruits like Richard. I didn't finally sign any contract for use of the land with Derek until early July. The opportunity to recruit formally had slipped away from me for the season. 2006, according to my



The first game in progress at Liverpool CC

schedule, was only a time to iron out the teething problems with the Council, and to get together a list of potential members who might join the project when I start in earnest in 2007. Already I'd found a few established players from other clubs; Steve Lewis, a top-ranking Bowdon migrant now lives a couple of miles away in Wavertree, renegades from Southport and Chester have pledged to give their support, and I've had unanticipated contact with Liverpool-connected players from as far as Tyneside and Surbiton. But I've had beginners clamouring at my door too. There have been approaches from the husband of someone's work colleague

(God knows why they were discussing me), and from the friends of a friend of someone's friend, who have all been discussing the club at the office water-cooler, or in the pub. In all, I'm probably headed towards my first real season with 15 or so full playing members signed up. And I've yet to lift a finger.

The problem is, and this is a big problem, one of storage. Derek had promised me a lockable wooden shed / ex-aviary. By July, its decrepitude was more apparent, and its usage was deemed unsuitable. So, throughout the season, all club equipment remained in the back of my car. If anyone comes to play, they have to wait for me. If I'm away, the club grinds to a halt. For the duration of the season, Liverpool Croquet Club and James Hawkins were one and the same person.

All an outsider sees is me, getting my equipment out of my car, carrying it to my croquet lawn and playing a game with my friends. There's nothing anywhere to indicate that this is a public activity. So how do I make that leap? How do I show them that I mean business, that this is for real and not some personal pipe-dream?

The answer is, of course, to get on with things. The new season, Season One, has to start with as much play on the lawns as possible. I've got to convert all my pledges of membership, from new as well as established players. I've got to sort out the storage issue, even if that's just a big steel shipping crate and a padlock. And I've got to make sure I've enough equipment to cater for all these enthusiastic croquet players.

Derek is the best resource a club could ever have. He's been looking down the back of the Liverpool City Council sofa, trying to find if there's a missing couple of thousand quid for spending on a temporary hut. Through him I've finally found the right person to speak to in the Council's Sports Development office. And that's led to the discovery of the local grants system. The Liverpool Culture Company was set up to organise events for next year's tenure as European Capital of Culture. They've a pile of money sloshing around for community arts and sports projects. If I have my way some of that cash will be coming to me to finance the purchase of equipment. I may not have storage finalised by then, but, by Easter when the season starts, I'll know whether I've got enough kit to allow the club to move forward straightaway. Fingers crossed.

CROQUET GOES TO THE RACES

Report by Klim Seabright

Anyone who has ever picked up a book on the history of Croquet will not have turned many pages before coming across a reference to Ireland. Anyone walking through Cheltenham between 13th and 16th March will know that it's impossible to go more than ten yards without being given a cheery greeting by someone from the Emerald Isle, as they make their way to Prestbury Park for the race meeting of the year.

It did not exactly take 'rocket science' to put the two events together, and this led me into the office of the Managing Director (Edward Gillespie) of Cheltenham Racecourse with a request that he help promote Croquet.

The response was remarkable. A list of sporting journalists



John Isaacs greets the press at Cheltenham Croquet Club

was handed over; an advertisement in the Racing Programme was offered; a croquet demonstration was arranged in the winner's enclosure; an information desk was set up next to the statue of Arkle; and the GB team were invited as VIP guests. Edward even had the area re-turfed and also managed to lay on perfect croquet weather!



David Magee gets to grips with John Inverdale

To use a sporting vernacular, this was to be a day of "two halves". The day started with a breakfast briefing at Cheltenham Croquet Club complimented by some practical experience on the lawns, expertly supervised by David and Eileen Magee. The Journalists and broadcasters included Rolf Johnson of the Daily Express, John Inverdale from Radio Five Live and a film crew from ITN.

The media became so engrossed in the play that they had to almost be forcibly led to the transport, which was waiting to take them to the Race Course for the second part of the day.

By the time the press arrived at the Race Course the croquet match between "Ireland" and "England" was in full swing. A hybrid cross between Association and Golf made an interesting, if somewhat puzzling, spectacle to the croquet cognoscenti. The

game was interlaced with various film crew and radio station representatives, taking the opportunity to record the event.

Sue Edwards and Graham Taylor, from Cheltenham Croquet Club, led the International Sides; and the "punters" from around



Graham Roberts sets up a croquet court

the parade ring were recruited to the teams. This led to some rather odd international qualifications, which certainly would not have been acceptable to the selection panels of either country. At one time the "Irish" team appeared to consist entirely of Yorkshire



Channel 4 do some low down filming folk!

Some talent was certainly spotted. A snooker playing midlander appeared to have a natural affinity with the game and a lady from Kings Lynn did well, once the rules were changed to allow her two shots everyone else's one!



Phil Cordingley explains the game to the course commentator...an Australian!

Meanwhile the great and the good from croquet, well Keith Aiton and Phil Cordingley, were live on air with John Inverdale.

There was a steady flow of people at the information desk. It was interesting to note the number of enquiries coming from people with their own lawns and/or sales enquiries. Some enquirers have been directed to their nearby club; and others were given the contact details for the CA shop.

A very worthwhile day was the conclusion of most. It should be recognised that excellent contributions from the volunteers of Cheltenham Croquet Club and the overwhelming generosity of Cheltenham Race Course made it all possible.



Now concentrate lads.

This one's for you Ma'am

Some Recollections

by John Solomon

We won the final test against NZ in 1951 despite having to forfeit a match as two of our players were injured in a car crash. Afterwards we played in the Dominion championships. I won the singles, beating Humphrey Hicks in the semi-final and Arthur Ross in the final, the handicap off -2 and the doubles with Humphrey. We were very naughty, tactically, as most of the pairs were ladies of 2 to 4 handicap and Humphrey decided that whoever of us went round first would leave one opponent 2 yards in front of 2 back. If they missed the lift it was a gift for us and if they hit they would probably stick in the first, which often happened.

As we were so near, Humphrey suggested that he and I go to Australia and we flew from Wellington to Sydney in a Solent flying boat, a Sunderland converted to civilian use. It was thrilling as we gathered speed and the spray got higher past the windows until we took off and there was relative silence except for the engines. We were woken with breakfast, a full English but with a steak and chop which were quite appalling, like candle grease.



We stayed with Robert and Claire Tingey and he taught me how to play a pass roll holding the shaft low down. If you have your lower hand an inch from the bottom of the shaft, (you must not touch the head) and try to play a stop shot it is impossible. Play a roll and you have a passroll. This is very common today but was almost unknown then.

Col. Albert Saalfeld was one of the few men playing in Australia and had a most unusual grip, holding the mallet as I do but only with his fingers and thumbs; the palms did not touch the shaft. He had a big yacht which entered the Sydney to Hobart race regularly and he took us out for a day sailing in the harbour. Humphrey and I were sitting on the deck as passengers and he passed me a note which said "God how I hate sailing". I did not agree.

We drove to Melbourne and Adelaide and back playing at several clubs, and flew to Tasmania and toured the island. We had to get berths on our return tickets but the ships were full for weeks. Fortunately Claire had a nephew who had many girl friends, one of whom worked in a shipping office and she put our names at the top of the waiting list! Whenever we left port dozens of friends on the quayside threw streamers to the ship. There would be hundreds of them which gradually broke as the ship pulled away. It was rather moving.

Coaching Tips From the Top

Coping with an indifferent surface

By Jonathan Kirby

Many a time you go to play at a new club and you discover that their lawns are not as pristine as the ones you are used to. There are little bumps and hollows, the grass cover is slightly patchy, or the grass is longer or courser than you would choose. Do you allow yourself to be put off by such trifles? If so, you are not playing to your ability and, worse, you are probably not enjoying yourself so much.

I have two suggestions for this situation - one mental and one technical. Firstly, you should accept in your mind that this surface is what you are playing on. Think how much fun it is to have a different challenge to the one you usually face. Before you start, and as you are playing, look around for any particular pitfalls. Are there any obvious slopes you need to allow for? Are there slow or fast patches? Are there rough patches where you need to get closer than usual to guarantee a roquet? How can you use these features to your advantage - perhaps in making a leave stronger? Perhaps your opponent hasn't noticed them, so now you have an advantage.

Occasionally the lawn really will catch you out. You should be prepared for this, and when the lawn causes you to miss a roquet think "Yes, I'm pleased that I played that stroke really well. I was unlucky this time, but I'll keep playing well and the luck will even itself out". There are too many players who allow bad luck to get them down.

My technical suggestion is for playing single ball strokes. Try to strike your ball at the point of your swing when your mallet is travelling horizontally. The bouncing about which happens on a rough surface is exacerbated by hitting the ball either slightly downwards or slightly upwards. If you swing flat through the ball you'll be amazed how many more roquets you make, even on patchy grass.

Middlesbrough CC moves to Albert Park

by Charles Waterfield

From the 1930s until the mid 1980s the only croquet played in the Teesside region was at the ICI club at Norton Hall. In 1986 a small band of enthusiasts started a club at Teesside Airport tennis centre. The club had many problems establishing reasonable lawn conditions and moved to Ormesby Hall (NT), changing its name to Ormesby Hall Croquet Club (OHCC) in 1988. Eventually the increasing number of outdoor events held by The National Trust became incompatible with croquet and the Club wanted to increase membership, improve and extend lawns and add facilities such as a clubhouse, all of which would have been impossible at Ormesby.



Albert Park Middlesbrough, the new venue for Middlesbrough CC

After discussions with Middlesbrough Council, an old bowling green with use of a clubhouse at Prissick Sports Centre was made available on acceptable terms. It was then possible to build on past achievements and maintain continuity in terms of having a local club participating in Northern Leagues. The new facilities were opened by the Mayor in June 1998, followed by an open day for the general public. A small extra practice lawn was added the following year. However it was never possible to lay out two full-sized lawns, even with an overlap.

In 2005 a very large Skateboard & BMX park was developed nearby, with the inevitable problems that large numbers of youths bring and providing a further incentive to look for a new home. Several possibilities were looked into, without any being suitable, until there was an invitation to discuss options at Albert Park. The Park Management, in consultation with existing Bowls groups, agreed in late 2006 that two of the four bowling greens would be available as croquet lawns (as indeed there were in the nineteenth century).

Albert Park is a restored Grade II park with historic Victorian origins. Within the Park are a Visitor Centre and a Sports Pavilion

and near to the latter are the bowling greens. The Park was donated to the people of Middlesbrough in 1868 by Henry Bolckow, one of the founders of the Iron & Steel industry on Teesside. In September 2004 a three-year £3.5M restoration scheme was completed, largely funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which also enabled the employment of a dedicated Park Manager and Community Ranger to maintain and develop the improvements. Covering an area of 30 hectares near the centre of Middlesbrough, recreation and sporting facilities include a boating and fishing lake, visitor centre and cafe, tennis courts, bowling greens and areas of open space for informal recreation and large events.

The club is confident that this will be a very successful move, not only in terms of facilities and lawn quality, but with good recruitment opportunities for new members. The opening event will be the 2nd Middlesbrough One-Ball Tournament on 22nd April.

Coaching Notes

by Keith Aiton

These notes are intended for coaches of groups of, or individual, players who aspire to play A-Class croquet or better.

Technique

Single ball strokes

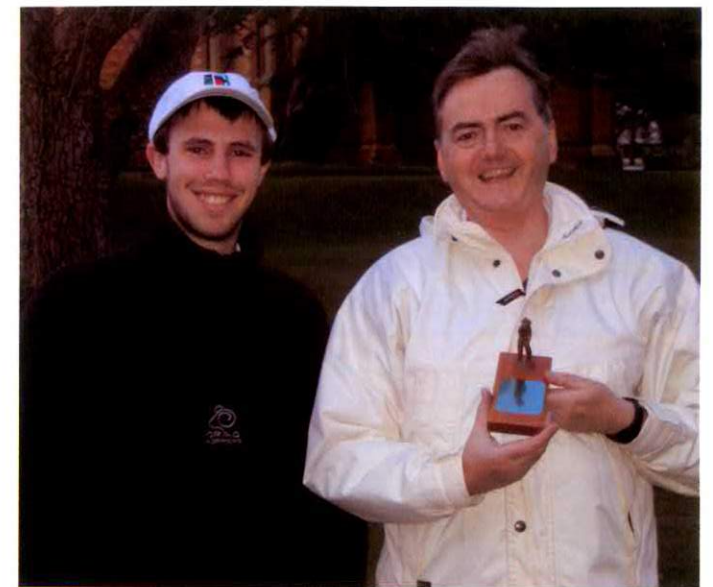
There is no one "correct" method to hit a croquet ball. Typically players evolve their own styles, sometimes totally on their own, more often by copying someone else. As long as the mallet head is basically parallel to the ground and the face is at right angles to the intended direction of hit at the moment of impact, and, most importantly, the ball goes towards the target, then the technique works.

Occasionally it may be necessary to help with some aspect of single ball play, for example poor contacts on rushes. In that case it would be worthwhile to check whether the mallet is in fact hitting down on the ball. One obvious cure for this is to stand fractionally further back from the striker's ball. This is a more reliable "fix" than trying to play rushes with a stab or stop-shot action.

Croquet strokes

The player should already have a good idea of how to play stop-shots, drives, rolls, split shots and take-offs. However, there is scope for improving the quality of these strokes. The first thing to do is instil the belief that playing accurate croquet strokes is a good thing. It is quite common for young players to be very good at shooting and hoop-running and this means that they may not have learned to appreciate the joys of not having to rely on those single ball skills.

In order to play accurate croquet strokes it is important to have a clear idea of where each ball is supposed to go. The "target" should be as small as possible as this helps focus the mind. So, pick out a spot on the lawn where each ball should end up. Do not simply have a vague idea of "somewhere near that hoop" or "anywhere as long as it's in front". Having selected specific and small targets think only of those targets as the shot is played. This will help to avoid the tendency to think about how to play the stroke as it is being played. The key is to trust your technique



Northampton Charity One-Ball entrants, Marcus Evans (Runner-up) and Keith Aiton (winner)

when in actual play.

If the technique is not producing the results you want then use practice time to find a technique that works. Let us say by way of example that the player observes that he quite often doesn't get the striker's ball to go far enough when playing a half roll, when the croqueted ball does travel the correct distance. To correct this error the player will need to try out different methods of striking his ball. The variables involved are (1) the position of the body when playing the stroke (2) the position of the hands on the mallet shaft (3) the angle of the mallet, (4) the point of contact on the striker's ball, and (5) the amount of follow through.

You should be aware of the different performance characteristics of different mallets. There are many mallets in use that are designed specifically to help the mallet head maintain its alignment towards the target in single ball strokes. These mallets tend to have most of their weight in the head. A player with one of these mallets will find it difficult to play stop shots with a ratio as low as one in six. The best he may be able to achieve is one in four. This will have a knock-on effect in his whole game, in that he may not be able to place the striker's ball as accurately in croquet strokes as a player with a different mallet that can play stop shots with a lower ratio. As a coach you will need to take this into account when discussing ball placement with the player.

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Tournament Round-Up

Rutger Rutger Beijderwellen won the Surbiton Easter Advanced, 8th-9th April 2007

by Kevin Carter



Rutger Beijderwellen, in play at Surbiton

Compared to previous Surbiton Advanced Tournaments at Easter, this event had some unusual aspects:

- it was not won by Jeff Dawson or Chris Farthing;
- it was warm and the conditions were rather faster than normal;
- consequently only 94 games were completed;
- and only 20 TPs achieved;
- the guest beer was a mild;
- Nelson did not break his mallet.

There were 32 players, 21 of which were on scratch or below, and a very flexible Swiss was employed.

On Monday morning I suffered from its being a Monday morning and Mark Hamilton suffered from sleep deprivation after having to complete an overnight milk round. By the afternoon

Rutger was the only one still unbeaten, with Chris Patmore remaining the only viable challenger, so the final was set. Chris had his chance, but Rutger's ruthless precision secured him a TP and the trophy.

An indicator of a successful Swiss event is for as few competitors as possible to go away with no win. Overnight there were five to sort out.

An out of form Tim Wilkins bounced back with a triple and George Noble did so with two. Only one player, who shall remain unnamed, finished with no win (possibly because he was unable to hear everybody urging him on).

Chris Farthing won the Surbiton Easter Handicap, 6-7 April 2007

by Samir Patel

Unseasonably warm conditions meant that the 2007 Surbiton Easter Handicap tournament had more of a Summer tournament feel to it, rather than an early season handicap event. A full field of 32 players, with handicaps ranging from -2 to 18 found themselves in search of sun protection, rather than the winter thermals they had brought with them.

The weather meant that the lawns were faster than usual for this time of year, timed at 11.5 seconds at around lunchtime on day 2. At the end of Day 1, 52 games had been completed with only three players left unbeaten Chris Farthing (-1.5), Gary Bennett (-0.5) and Chris Patmore (-1.5) - with a large contingent of 11 players on only one loss.

Day 2 saw Chris Farthing beat off the remaining challengers to finish unbeaten at the end of the flexible Swiss with 7 wins over Neil Cote (12), Paul Salisbury (-0.5), Nigel Graves (9), John Bee (8), Ian Parkinson (1.5), Gary Bennett (-0.5) and Chris Patmore (-1.5), all by impressive double-figure margins.

Final Positions

1. Chris Farthing (7/7)
2. Paul Salisbury (5/6)
3. Nigel Graves (4/5)

North West Federation Advanced

Heaton Park, 31st March - 1st April

by Geoff Young

The NWFFC tournament for the Neil Williams and Woodlands trophies took place at Heaton Park on 31 March and 1 April. The weather was almost all sunny though with a rather fresh strong breeze most of the time. The courts were having their first use in the year.

Nine players contested the A class event in flexible Swiss format, Ian Lines defending the trophy strongly with three TPs in four straight wins on the Saturday. On the first game of Sunday he was defeated by Brian Storey, who had already lost one game. For the rest of Sunday it was looking as though Ian might still win on the probability that he would get in eight games to Brian's seven, but defeat by Ken Cooper in the last meant Brian on 5/6 was playing Richard Griffiths with a chance to win. He pegged out Richard's black to set up a two against one time-limited endgame (Y on 3, Blue on 1b). Both players had and lost chances but at time Richard was still ahead, so Ian took the cup home again.

In the B class almost all games went to time (2h 45m). Ray Lowe and Dennis Graham each won three on the Saturday. On Sunday Ray began by defeating Dennis, and confirmed his trophy by making it a 6-game clean sweep.

Coaching for Handicaps 1.5 to 5

by David Openshaw

Here's an easy way to reduce your handicap by 2.

Me: Would you like to improve your results?

Player (Handicap 1.5 to 5): Yes I would.

Me: Well that's easy to achieve.

Player: Is it. How can I do that?

Me: You need to improve your 4 ball breaks.

Player: But I can play four ball breaks.

Me: No you cannot.

Player: But you have never seen me play.

Me: That does not matter. If your handicap is 1.5 to 5 then you certainly cannot play four ball breaks.

Player: Well I think I can play four ball breaks pretty well.

Me: OK let me suggest how you can improve.

The first step is to substantially increase your expectations. From now on when you have a four-ball break you must always complete it. Not sometimes, not 70% of the time, not 95% of the time, but always. OK?

Player: OK

Me: To go with that expectation you need to develop the confidence that you will always complete a four-ball break. It's important to work on your own on both these factors.

Player: So do I need to practice more?

Me: Well probably. But you can practice at home to help you develop your confidence. Here how you do that? Imagine you are playing a four-ball break from hoop one with the balls in ideal positions. See yourself playing a good rush to hoop one. Then a perfect approach a foot in front of the hoop and the croqueted ball in ideal position.

Where are you going to rush it after you run the hoop? Pick out an exact position for that ball as you play the stroke. Then you run the hoop getting that perfect rush. Make the rush. Now where is the perfect position for the pioneer for hoop 3. And what is the exact spot you want your striker's ball to go to near the pivot ball. You get the picture?

Player: Yes I do. I need to be more precise with the ball placement. Just because I do not break down doesn't mean I am playing the break well.

Me: Exactly. So you can help your confidence a lot by using this practice

technique at home. Sitting in a chair or better still walking round the room. But play the shots at your normal playing pace. You can also vary things by starting with the balls in non-favourable positions eg the pioneer for two is half way to corner 2. How does that change things? How are you going to play so that you are 100% sure of continuing the break? The importance of this kind of practice is that you continually see yourself playing successful shots.

Player: But I should also practice on the lawn.

Yes. What I recommend is regular practice on the lawns as well. Set up the balls, sometimes in good positions, sometimes in difficult positions. Play your four-ball break. Remember your expectations are high. So pick out exactly where you want the balls to go. After you see the result of your shot you focus on the next shot. What is now required? What has changed from the ideal? No looking back on the previous shot. Your focus is all on the current shot. Decide where you want to send the balls, then play the shot. Player: Do you recommend how much I should practice.

Me: Well generally the more you practice the better. Spend 50% of your croquet time on practice and 50% on playing. But what's very important is to make the practice effective. Now you are not going to break down on your four-ball break are you? So if you do, then that should be the end of your practice. Even if it's the first hoop and you have just spent 30 mins travelling to the club. Make it a policy to finish practice if you break down. Spend some time cleaning the club house instead. This will help you discipline yourself and reinforce your expectations. And put some pressure on your practice.

One final point. There may be times when you do break down. Do not let this affect your confidence and expectations. You never break down on four ball breaks! Remember your successes. This is the way to reduce your handicap by at least 2 this season. See you for next season's coaching in a year.

And another final point. I said it was easy to improve your results by improving your four-ball breaks. Well it is easy as long as you make a very strong commitment to increasing your expectations and confidence. That's the difficult bit. Believe in your destiny and your play will improve considerably.

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