

THE CROQUET GAZETTE

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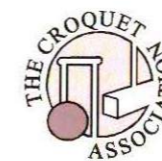
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Chairman's Column

How pleasing it is to meet fellow members of the CA who tell me they have read my column and then add their own thoughts about subjects or events. It may mean that I will have to change my photo each time until I get universal approval however!



You may wonder where I have met up with fellow croquet players. In the winter time, most of us do not have access to a club with winter lawns so if we want to play the alternatives are either to use an indoor mat or utilise outdoor Astroturf. I have been able to do both this winter by playing on a mat at Soham in the East Anglia federation, where they hold Association croquet and Golf croquet weekends, and also playing on Astroturf at Shobnall in the East Midlands federation for their annual Golf croquet event. It would be good to hear what other federations do to keep the croquet momentum and companionship going, perhaps linking it to social events like Bridge, Scrabble or Quiz events.

The extension of the office to hold the stock of equipment, books and associated croquet items is complete. Liz Larsson, the CA Office Manager has worked with David Magee of the Cheltenham Croquet Club, plus architects, builders and planners to see this project through. It has been decided not to hold an event to "open" the extension, but our very grateful thanks go to the Cheltenham Croquet Club for allowing us room to accommodate this storage extension plus the toilet facility.

Grateful thanks must also be extended to our benefactors, both past and present. It has been agreed that half the cost of the extension will be met from the Benefactors' Fund. This fund receives donations both from goodwill gestures – those who "give whilst they live" – and from those who remember the CA in their Wills.

Ever wondered how to help both your club and the CA? The answer lies with the membership incentive scheme that is continuing for one more year. Anyone joining the CA for the first time and naming a club on the form gives an entitlement of £10 rebate to that club on their annual fee the following year. Whilst the CA hopes for more tournament members, all are eligible for this benefit for their new club, be they non-tournament members or juniors.

Finally I want to ask for your suggestions for a new President that I can ask the Executive committee to consider. Bernard Neal has told me he wishes to stand down at the AGM in October and the deadline for nominations is 1st June. He tells me that with the MacRobertson Shield being contested in 2010 it will need someone with stamina! I am sorry to learn that Bernard is retiring and will thank him at the AGM.

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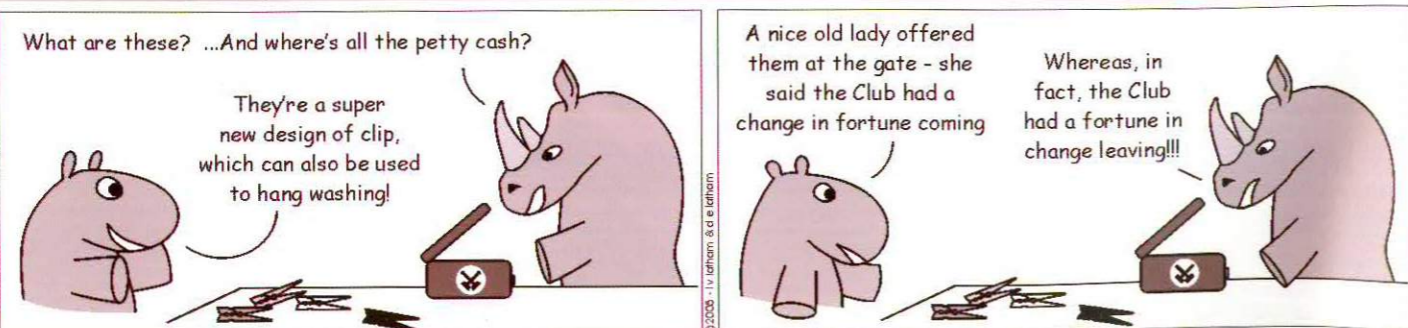
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Tournament Reports & Results
Emailed reports are welcomed. Attachments may be sent in Microsoft Word format, or text format. Handwritten reports are no longer acceptable due to the illegibility of most. Queries regarding the delivery of the Gazette to members should be directed to the Secretary of the Croquet Association and not to the Editor.

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HOOPOTAMUS

by Victor



Letters

CA Membership

Last season two issues were raised at competitions for which no-one had an answer.

1. How to make those who run croquet more in-touch with the club member.

2. Why should a club member pay to join the CA as a tournament member to play in a club tournament which is in the fixture book when they have no intention of playing in tournaments elsewhere?

While reading the manifestos of those seeking election to council I formed the view that only a few of them would have any interest in these issues. (I wonder how many votes were cast for each candidate) Perhaps we could tackle both these issues with one significant change to the CA structure. Remove the tournament membership classification and raise the missing funds by other means eg raising the per capita levy on clubs, publishing the Gazette on line and selling subscriptions for hard copy.

How would this change help? The candidates for council would have a larger population to canvass and who knows perhaps some non-tournament players would appear on council. Club members in remote clubs faced with annual membership fees of £150 would not have to pay the tournament membership fee to the CA before they paid to enter their one annual weekend tournament.

Perhaps someone out there has a better way of tackling these two issues.

Don Beck

I am pleased to respond to Don Beck's letter and confirm that those who run croquet at the Council level of the CA are in touch with club members. All Councillors are members of recognized clubs and most play regularly in club, federation as well as CA events.

As a result of "being in touch" the CA Association and Golf Tournament committees have already considered at their winter meetings the subject as to why a club member should be a CA tournament member to play in a club tournament listed in the Fixtures Book.

The CA treats its members equally and would not want to see an advantage

being given to those members of clubs that host events that go into the Fixtures Book over members of clubs that are unable to host such events. Everyone is entitled to enter their first tournament with the exemption from being a tournament member. Their decision is then whether to play in more tournaments and whether it is worth paying the tournament membership fee for the privilege.

Turning to the subject of restructuring to pay for this, it could be that club membership fees would have to be doubled or increased by an even greater factor! This is something that is unlikely to meet with favour from the majority of the membership, although I shall be interested to read any response to this.

Publishing the Gazette on-line is not on the current agenda although publishing on-line back issues is already a reality. If the Gazette was published on-line, there would probably be only a minority requesting a hardcopy making it a non-viable.

Coming from a remote rural club with a small membership fee I can only be thankful that the CA exists and puts on tournaments and lists other clubs' tournaments for my enjoyment for which I am happy to pay.

Patricia Duke-Cox

Golf Croquet

In reference to the February Croquet Gazette. How nice to see nearly two complete pages devoted to GOLF CROQUET! A bit like the old days when we had a Golf Croquet section and once even a Gold Croquet Magazine!

Just a couple of points of fact regarding the 'Bill Arliss Review of 2008'.

The idea of the Golf Croquet Committee was proposed by Brian MacMillan, (ex. Secretary and Commercial Manager), but by the time this was formed Brian had left the Council and it fell to me to get it under way, there was no difficulty in getting enthusiastic active members and the game was on!

Secondly, a beginners competition, called the Golden Mallet, was devised and run successfully for the CA by Chris Hudson, but the CA decided that this was not worth

continuing. Croquet for Leisure with the aid of Rosemary Longbottom however considered this was too important to lose, so continued it as the Grass Roots, later adding the Centre Stage (as medium level) and Top of the Tree (top level). Grass Roots and Centre Stage were later, as stated, passed to the CA but I do not know about us "becoming ill" as Bill stated, and they were never "in danger of collapsing", we had much more commitment to Golf Croquet than the CA!

I think credit for introducing and developing Golf Croquet should be given to Brian MacMillan, Chris Hudson and Rosemary Longbottom, without them and others it would not have happened.

Syd Jones

Thank you Syd for filling in some of the rest of the early history of GC in the CA domain. It is a great privilege for me to be able to write as the Chair of what is now just the GC Tournament Committee, with all the other GC-related matters absorbed into the other committees alongside AC. I believe we have been through our growing pains and we are past the danger of following the splits that exist in, for example, rugby, darts and boxing. The CA now has a balanced view of both forms of croquet. Clearly, the efforts of many enthusiastic individuals have been the foundation of getting us to this current healthy situation.

Tim King

Badges for referees

I have some sympathy with your correspondent, Mr Tony Backhouse. when one raises one's mallet during a game, one is never sure who or what is coming onto the lawn to adjudicate, I am however not in favour of badges, which would lower the standards of the game, appearing more like supermarket assistants, or conference attendees!

I would like to suggest to the appropriate committee seriously consider giving titles to referees. For example, Mr Backhouse would become the "Ref" T Backhouse, Championship referees would become the "Very Ref" and examining referees would be "Cannons".

I hope that this suggestion will be taken up by the CA, as I feel that ideas such as this will dramatically improve the standard of the game, and satisfy the need for some referees to be recognised.

Ivor Needfore-Bisques

A Laws Problem at Hurlingham?

As a recently qualified association referee, I felt that some of the examination questions on the laws were complex, far-fetched and would never occur in normal play. Six months later at the Hurlingham Advanced Weekend I learnt that truth can be stranger than fiction.

Babs aimed at red, a corner ball in corner 3, missed, replaced a blue ball adjacent to red on the yard line, and retired to a deckchair. Ray was just arranging the balls for his croquet shot when he was forestalled by an irate posse of players from the next court demanding their blue ball back and requesting its accurate repositioning on their yard line where it had been in a critical position. Ray responded that he had not been responsible for the ball-napping, but could not convincingly argue that the blue ball belonged to his game since another blue ball was clearly visible on his court near corner 4 and there was a black ball lying against the board near the corner. Blue was returned to its rightful owners, black was reintroduced as the ball to take croquet from, and the game continued uneventfully. Everything was blamed on Babs, who was oblivious on his deckchair. Gabby from the double-banked game, a Hurlingham member who knew some of the players from the other game, was particularly forceful that he was not Babs!

What would have happened if the mistake had not been spotted promptly? Even more intriguingly, what would have happened if the black ball had been ball-napped, in which case the mistake would have been invisible? Should the matter have been dealt with under Law 31 (Misleading information), Law 55 (Situations not properly covered by other laws) or Law 33 (Interference with a ball by an outside agency). A senior referee consulted at teatime opined that the other ball might as well have been a hedgehog (as in "Alice in Wonderland"). Truly the game is full of surprises!

Richard Jackson

"Aspiring Referees will be pleased to hear that the Exam questions have been revised over the winter to make them consistent with the amendments to the Laws last year and try to eliminate ambiguities. The Part A, multiple-choice, questions are about straightforward situations that could easily occur during play. The Part B ones are deliberately more complex, as they are designed to test candidates' ability to cross-

reference between several laws, but some of those are also taken from games.

The actual incident that Richard Jackson reports seems to have been handled well, though in theory a Referee on Appeal should consult both players to get their view as to what may have happened, as well as any witnesses he thinks may have information to offer.

The International Laws Committee considered, during the last round of amendments, whether to expand the laws to explicitly cover cases where a ball not in the game was used in a stroke, but deferred the issue as too complex. Law 55 is therefore appropriate and paragraphs 5.3 and 27.5.5 of the ORLC give some guidance as to how it should be applied."

Ian Vincent

B class play

I found Lee Hartley's and John Solomon's comments on B class games extremely interesting, and they prompted some further thoughts. Is it frustrating to play five games and not peg out? Not really, because I don't peg out that often, especially with shorter time limits. What is frustrating is that croquet is a particularly difficult game (for me, anyway); rushes go astray, hoops are clanged, hoop approaches don't end up in front of the hoop, hit-ins don't hit in. B class players can play an all-round break, but mostly it doesn't quite happen. My handicap, 2, suggests that I'm likely to break down at least once on the way round.

On the other hand, games in which the innings changes hands frequently and mistakes lead to unpredictability are often a lot more interesting than an accomplished +26tp. In the Pendle tournament last year one of my games had all sorts of ups and downs, ins and outs - a contact, wrong ball played, a couple of good breaks, etc - and Lee, having watched a fair bit of it, said it was the "best", i.e. most entertaining, exciting, enjoyable, game of the weekend. It was engrossing, but hardly one for the purists.

One problem with croquet is a certain lack of variety. I'd like to play more varied forms of the game. John Solomon's suggestion of 14-point games is one I'd like to try; but can such games go on one's handicap card? Bonus points for pegging out could make for more attacking croquet, but defence is important too; something that encouraged too much risky, not to say suicidal, play might betray the nature of

croquet. Again, I'd like to try it, and Lee's evidently found that it can work well.

An idea that has occurred to me, strictly in the B class context, is to give each player a few bisques, probably two. Such bisques could not be taken after the first stroke of a turn, nor after running the last hoop in a turn at the end of which the opponent has an advanced rules lift, i.e. a bisque could not be used to negate or create a leave. The advanced croquet skills of hitting in from distance and of making a leave would not be affected. A bisque would enable a player to keep a break going. Someone who'd got the forward ball to 4-back without using one might go for a bisque-assisted triple peel, or go on to the peg and give a contact.

One objection I can foresee is that when, say, handicap 1 plays 6, as can happen, each bisque should be more productive for the 1 than the 6 and the game would be even more loaded in the lower-handicap player's favour than it normally would be. I think we should use all these variations from time to time within clubs, if not in open tournaments.

Mark Miller

The long and the short of it

Next year we at Surbiton are hosting the MacRob finals, and I want to make sure that all our equipment falls properly within the laws.

Law 3(a) is ambiguous about the length of the peg extension. In 3(a)2 it states that it must be 6 inches long, but does not say whether this is the length of the piece of dowel, or the length exposed when the dowel is seated in the peg.

If it is the exposed length (and a straw poll of players believes this is the meaning) the length you make the extension depends on the hole in the peg, and probably varies from peg to peg. My own view is that the law should say something like 'the length should be such that when fully seated in the peg, no less than 4 and no more than 6 inches should be exposed'. This would legalise most clubs' extensions.

I think a ruling in the Gazette would be of wide interest to all who look after their clubs' equipment.

Mike Lambert.

"My interpretation agrees with that of your sample of players: 6 inches is the length of the extension above the top of the peg, excluding the fixing which is mentioned in the next sentence. The same applies to the 1/2 inch diameter. No tolerance is given

for the dimensions, but I don't consider them to be critical, as the extension is there to hold clips and may be temporarily removed by the striker."

Ian Vincent

Croquet in Art

I was interested to read the article about croquet paintings in the February Gazette. I thought you might like to see a watercolour I painted many years ago, pictured below left. It represents a croquet tournament at the Parkstone Club.

Allen Parker

Sharing my gift

My niece recently gave me the table croquet set, pictured below right, as a gift. Aren't young people wonderful?

It has testimonials printed on the inside of the box from Lily Gower, Lt Col Needham, Secretary of the All England Croquet Association, Olive Henry and Maude Drummond.

John Crisp

Why not 18 points for handicap games?

Drawn games - maybe. 14 point games - annoying if you manage to get a break under control at around hoop 4 or so.

The 18 point game I first discovered some years ago at one of the Nottingham August tournaments. After making hoop 1 the player puts his/her second clip on 3-back. The advantages are obvious: (1) it should enable the game to be finished within a 3

hour time limit but more importantly (2) it provides the "end game" which is so often denied in a timed game - particularly to high-handicappers, many of whom never get to experience the tactics when all the clips are on the last 3-4 hoops, and rarely have enjoyed the thrill of pegging out.

One-day Super-B Events for working players

Following on from the discussion on the Nottingham Board, referred to last month in "The View from the Bar", readers may be interested to know that various events are planned:

Peter McDermott at Middlesbrough on 4 July;

Richard Stevens at Hamptworth on 27 June (with a H/C event on 26 June);

Tunbridge Wells on 20 June and 1 August.

The objective is to provide a competitive 4-game advanced event that does not take up the whole weekend, thus encouraging working players in the single-digit range to take part more often. [Others can obviously enter, but working players should take priority if over-subscribed.] Prospective entrants should contact each organiser directly.

Alex Jardine

How did he do that?

I once heard that John Solomon played and won a doubles match when his partner failed to turn up. What I'd love to know is how he did it. What standard were his opponents? What were his tactics? Could he be persuaded to write it up for the Gazette?

Mark Miller

"My partner, Pat Cotter was delayed in returning from a cruise on which he taught bridge. I asked David Prichard, the Chairman of the Laws committee if I could play on my own and he agreed. There is scant mention of it in the September 1972 Gazette other than to question the validity of the match as Maurice Reckitt thoroughly disapproved.

My opponents were Terence Read, about -1 and his mother Nancy about +2, both competent players. I put Cotter's ball on the 3rd corner spot and deemed it to be played. Thereafter I hit many times and was able to rush Cotter's ball in front of its hoop and peel it, then making it myself, rarely making more than one hoop at a time. The Reads played as though it was a normal game and did not realize that they could put Cotter's ball anywhere, even with their own balls and put my own in a corner. I am surprised to remember that I won +24, and the second game +21.

The manager, Daisy Lintern said I had to start the next round against Ian Baillieu and Bernie Duthie, both moderate players of about +4 and +6, but Ian's tactics were very good and he realised that they should keep my ball on the boundary or a corner and put my partner's anywhere. I did not hit as often as I had against the Reads and lost the first game -19. Half way through the second game it was getting late and we were pegged down. The next morning my partner appeared and we won the game and the match.

John Solomon

Continued on page 12

Editorial

I apologise for the slight lateness in this issue arriving, perhaps some of you haven't even

noticed, now the season has started and you have club sessions to attend and tournaments and team events to look forward to.

Llanfairfechan members are no doubt enjoying their new pavilion, the story of which you can read elsewhere in this issue. I'm sure that there is a great sense of relief after all of the problems and funding difficulties they encountered along the way.

Elsewhere in this issue, Jonathan Toye and Paul Strover are hoping to gain some interest for a competition for disabled players in East Anglia, and other Federations would of course be more than welcome to join in. This is not a new venture, there was a similar scheme run twenty years ago in Glasgow, but it's good to see that croquet is still being offered to everyone who shows an interest.

Congratulations to Littlehampton Croquet Club who celebrate their centenary this year. An exhibition of the progress over the past 100 years was held in the Littlehampton museum, and other events will surely follow.

Each time readers are asked what they would like to see in the Gazette, two answers continually crop up 'coaching' and 'humour', I'm sure Freud would find a connection, perhaps the humour helps to take away the frustrations left by the coaching, who knows. As this issue tends to be the 'not quite in full swing issue' but does include April Fools Day, then I have included both sections. I make no apologies for reproducing some of the coaching items from previous issues of the Gazette, as why re-invent the wheel, good advice from coaches and players is always welcome, and there will be members who have not been around for twenty years who wish to improve their play. As for the humour, all I will say is don't shoot the Editor, all contributors deserve a break and some encouragement.

I have been trying to solicit some golf croquet coaching material, but it's not been too forthcoming, so if you wish to impart your knowledge and experience on a wider audience you know where to send it, (no not to the webmaster, but to the Editor).

I've decided to step out of semi-retirement this season, and intend to play more, partly because I've finally realised I miss playing, and partly because although the Gazette keeps me informed of what is happening, I feel I don't get to hear as much as I used to when I played more regularly. I'm looking forward to seeing some old friends and making some new ones over the coming season and don't be shy if you have any views on anything you like to see in the Gazette, I'll probably be the one sitting down a lot or repairing divots, but that's all part of the fun when you realise there is more to life than winning.

Wishing you all a sunny and successful season

Gail Curry
Editor



The View from the Bar

A Summary of discussion topics from the Nottingham List by Nick Parish

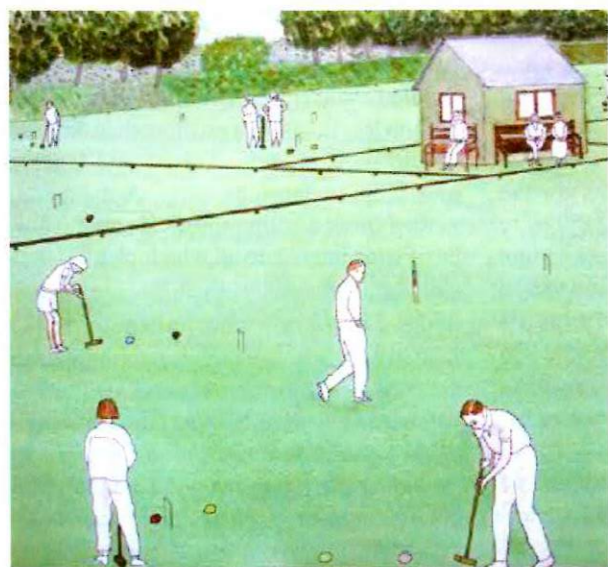
A quick update on last time's account of Australian newcomer Robert Fletcher (15 years old). He is now up to number two in Australia (number one on current form) and number 14 in the world, following a run to the semi-final of the New Zealand Open (going down to Stephen Mulliner) and victory in the Victoria Gold Cup and the Australian Gold and Silver Medals. You will recall that he played his first ranking game less than 18 months ago. Certainly one to watch in the World Championships in May.

Speaking of the World Championships, the challenge of getting a croquet mallet on and off an aeroplane undamaged has sparked an interesting thread, with lots of suggestions. Cricket bags were popular, generally being big enough to carry mallets inside them protected with clothes, while other solutions included a keyboard case, a guitar case and a number of custom-made jobbies involving a length of drainpipe, and much ingenuity. However a worryingly large number of apparently peace-loving people plumped for some form of gun-carrying case. One player had his confiscated for two days by New Zealand customs officials (you would have thought they would have worked out there wasn't a gun inside when they opened the case and looked in, but perhaps Antipodean customs officials are taught not to jump to conclusions). However my favourite story was from a player who packed his mallet shaft in a sealed tube. When asked about this by airport officials, and telling them the truth, on a couple of occasions they did not understand what a mallet handle was and took it for a security threat, costing inordinate time and hassle. That player now tells them it's a gun, and it gets checked in with no further questions asked.

There are usually a few rules queries on the list. One interesting one which was raised recently and I wasn't aware of was that if during the striking period you drop a clip onto a ball, that is end of turn (even if the ball does not move) because the clip is considered to be part of your clothes. A number of people feel that to be an unnecessarily harsh penalty. It has also, inevitably, sparked a debate on where the safest place is to carry a clip, since clipping it onto a pocket or shirt does run the risk of it falling off onto a ball at an inopportune moment. Some champion carrying the clip in your pocket, but others dislike the feel of a chunky object, and of course that is not proof against holes. Others attach their clips to their hat, shoe, waistband or even (in the case of one Australian player) their ear. The mind boggles.

Lots of other stuff the last couple of months, mostly on the subject of whether it is easier or harder to play croquet on a fast lawn than a slow lawn. The length of this debate has outstripped that even on the nature of change, but the results can be summed up very simply - everybody accepts that it is difficult to play croquet on a lawn so slow that you can't physically hit or rush a ball from one end to the other. However, that aside, one person thinks that it is easier to play croquet on a faster lawn, while everyone else thinks it is easier to play on a slower lawn. You pays your money...

To subscribe to the list, go to <http://nottingham-lists.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/croquet>. You can receive emails individually or as a daily digest.



Obituaries

Derek Bradley 19th August 1929 to 31st January 2009

Once in a while there is a small window of opportunity, that if taken, can substantially affect the subsequent course of events. Such a window occurred in the Spring of 1991 when a certain Derek Bradley stood in the Cheltenham Croquet Club car park and looked over the hedge to see what was going on. A club member playing on Lawn 1, to his eternal credit, said to Derek, you should be at this side of the hedge.

Derek joined the Club as did Jean, his wife and they learned to play croquet. But it wasn't too long after that when a new lawns manager was required and Derek was soon signed up for the job. In 1993 he produced a ten-year plan which took ten years to complete. Now Derek was the first to admit that what he knew about grass could be written on the back of a stamp which is an interesting admission for a lawns manager to make. But of course he knew about water and irrigation and engineering. He knew how to estimate costings and draw up work schedules for a project, so that at Committee meetings when he explained some necessary work and asked for funding to carry out the task, we never thought twice about it. Yes Derek, please go ahead that will be fine. He instilled such confidence in the rest of us and for a number of years he was also Chairman of the Committee, that catchall of tasks.

Cheltenham Croquet Club is a stage for the World's best players. As such these players expect world class conditions, never mind the fact that it has rained continuously for thirty days or not rained for thirty days or that every grub, parasite and fungus has taken up residence in our lawns. So the responsibility can be quite intense in advance of the many important events staged here. Our own club members can also be a bit picky if they are not playing well and want something or someone to blame.

Among Derek's many achievements here at Cheltenham, there are two that stand out and will remain as his great legacy to both members and visitors. He had a dream scheme to relay and extend three of our courts and improve all the surrounding areas; this was a brave venture requiring a large budget and a firm nerve. Despite many hours of completing lottery grant forms and attending meetings only to be turned down, we appealed to the membership who so generously gave and loaned the necessary money. What should have been a 6-week job turned into 12-month nightmare. We have a wonderful picture of Derek surrounded by a crowd of players on a sunny day at the end of a large national tournament, sinking his spade vigorously into one of the lawns. As soon as the turf had been stripped it rained and continued to rain on and off, mostly on, for many months. But Derek held his nerve and 18 months later the courts were officially opened and since that time have been the subject of great acclaim. One visiting lady player last year even wrote an article about her visit saying that as soon as she stepped onto lawn 11, "croquet heaven had been reached, I was in love with this lawn that was as smooth as a baby's bottom."

During the 18-month rainy season between the start and finish of the new lawns project, the fates decided to test Derek's

nerves even further. On the night of March 16th 2001, a group of, lets be polite and call them ne-er-do-wells, blew up the main wooden central lawns pavilion which had only recently been refurbished. Apart from the gut wrenching sight of the burnt out shell and a million small fragments of roof tiles covering all the adjacent lawns, there was the not inconsiderable matter of a four-day tournament in two weeks time. Well, Derek had us all organised and got huts moved about in the nick of time and we survived. The two wonderful pavilions you see in the centre of the lawns were Derek's project and many players continue to be thankful for their shelter, indeed we hold parties in them when we have corporate events here.

Talking about huts and pavilions. In 2002 when the headquarters of the Croquet Association moved to Cheltenham, Derek organised the relocation of our large groundsman's hut. He led a team of members stripping and dismantling the building, with him up top on the roof. Several weeks ago when we had to move the groundsman's hut again, this time without Derek, we decided it was too difficult for us and paid loads of money to men with a crane to do the job for us.

And what was Jean doing all the while that Derek was patrolling his domain? Well, she was certainly a class act in the tea room, but after Jean's dodgy ankles forced an early retirement from playing croquet, you would often find her patiently sitting on the bench in front of the clubhouse, chatting to whomever was around, often for quite a long time until Derek had seen everything he wanted to see or spoken to everyone he wanted to speak to. You got the feeling Derek would not be hurried in these matters.

When you sit down to write a piece about someone, first thoughts are usually what shall I say, with Derek there is so much to say, so what shall I have to miss out. For instance, we haven't talked about Derek the croquet player, keen, competitive and competent or Derek the public speaker, effortless and charming, Derek the planner of schemes such as the gates and railings at the entrance to the club. We have not mentioned here Derek's working career or his children or grandchildren, so very important in his life.

The Croquet Association instituted an award by which Clubs can honour a club member for exceptional service. Derek was an early recipient of this award, the CA Club Diploma and the Club's nomination for Derek's Croquet Association Diploma reads as follows:

"Derek joined the Club in 1991 to learn to play croquet and by October 1992 was attending Committee Meetings as the Club Lawn's Manager. Additionally he became vice-chairman in 1997 and chairman in 1999. Had we even paid a fraction of the going rate for Derek's work and expertise, the Club would have been bankrupt long ago. Although a hugely versatile Club Member willing to roll up his sleeves and stick his arm down any troublesome area, it is his dedication to Cheltenham's lawns that



deserves the most acclaim. Grass is what we have most of, what people first see and comment on at length. Derek's forbearance with all the croquet playing world and their opinions on grass management is awesome. No doubt he reflects on such matters whilst sucking on his pipe whilst touring the Club grounds on his regular pre-breakfast inspections. The Club owes Derek an enormous thank you.'

Too right, so thank you Derek and thank you Jean for supporting him so well and so patiently.

David Magee

Allen Backway, Plymouth C.C.

It is with regret we have to report the death of Allen Backway, the founder of Plymouth Croquet Club. Twenty two years ago Allen, already 75, was looking for a new challenge and decided that as Plymouth lacked an official Croquet Club it was time to put that right.

South West Water had agreed that the turf-covered reservoir in the Mannamead area of the city could be used for the game and Allen and his wife Mary began canvassing for members. Nearly all who joined were beginners so the Backways invited them for supper and croquet videos at their home and top regional coaches came to give coaching.

Initially there was only enough equipment for three lawns and because there was no clubhouse this was kept in the Park Keepers hut which was situated by the tennis courts in the adjacent park. Prior to play, hoops mallets and balls had to be loaded into a barrow and wheeled round to the newly created lawns.

Allen located a secondhand timber building and it was erected beside the lawns. The club now had a home but funds were small so Allen, with great ingenuity, converted wheeled 'shoppers' to carry hoops and balls. He organised a publicity drive and soon there was a thriving club of 60 members and Plymouth began competing in regional competitions.

Allen had a huge enthusiasm and energy for everything he did and although an infrequent player himself he was full of ideas for promoting and improving the club.

Allen was the first President of the club, a post he held for many years and relinquished only some four years ago. He died in February at the age of 97 and we send our sympathies to his wife Mary.

The original club building has been enlarged, the roof level raised and more contemporary kitchen facilities have recently been installed.

The Club has four lawns which are patially maintained by the Plymouth City Council

The members of the club pay tribute to Allen and his vision and drive which resulted in so many Plymouth people being introduced to the game of croquet.

Ruth Rendle

Development News

Llanfairfechan & North Wales Croquet Club

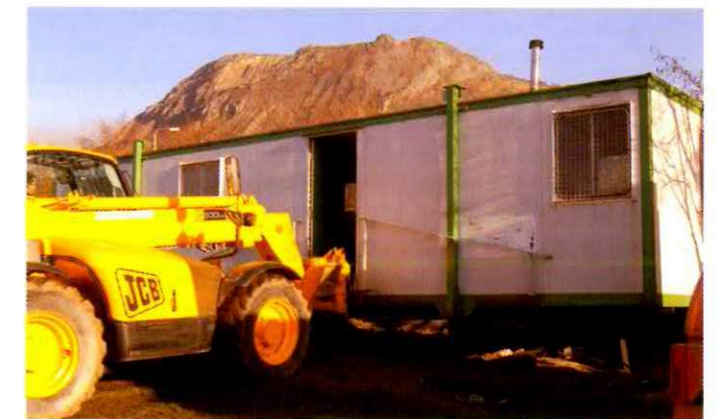
New Clubhouse Project

by Jack Pattenden

There is no better location to play Croquet than the lawns at Llanfairfechan. With a backdrop of the Carneddau mountains and a glorious view across the Menai Strait to Ynys Môn and Puffin Island what more could we want.

Since the early 1990's we had enjoyed the cosy comfort of a converted contractor's site office as a clubhouse which served us well for 15 years. But with an expanding membership and numbers of visitors increasing our amenities were becoming stretched. Space was limited, we had no electricity or gas on site and probably most inconvenient (excuse the pun) we had no proper loos. The time had come to consider an upgrade.

An approach to Conwy Council produced a promise to set aside £5000 to add to our own capital reserve of about £10000 to get us started. This led to serious discussion at our committee meeting in April 2006 when we decided there was little purpose in going for one or other of our needs on a piecemeal basis - we would go the whole hog and try to raise enough money to build a completely new Clubhouse. First we had to put a few things to rights.



The old clubhouse being 'waltzed' to its new location

We had no legal tenure of our lawns, it was doubtful if our constitution gave us the powers we needed to carry out our plans, the Council would not deal with us while we continued to operate as one of a loose group of clubs in the Llanfairfechan Sports Association and of course the small matter of planning approval. We knew that to do the job properly we needed to engage professionals and this would cost money. Would the membership want us to use our laboriously acquired reserves on a project which may come to nothing? A meeting was called and, to our relief, unanimous approval given to the committee to go for it!

Despite a few hiccups a 25 year lease was negotiated by the end of the summer. Whilst this was going on we appointed AP Thomas Architects of Bangor to draw up plans and seek planning permission with a view to obtaining tenders for construction. Our initial thoughts had envisaged something like £60000 but Architects told us the nature of the building we had in mind would be nearer £90000. Also the nature of the site which originated as a spoil tip for the construction of the A55 twenty years earlier would necessitate a ground survey to be carried by Engineers. We duly paid him his fee and what did we get? A report that confirmed we would have to spend an additional £30000 to construct a foundation that would prevent our building sinking into the ground! By now what we thought would cost us £60000 had rocketed to over £130000 and we had already used up £5000 of our hard won capital!

Nothing for it but to plough on and planning permission was granted with little difficulty. Architects were instructed to seek tenders from three local builders. When we had added our old friend VAT the best offer landed us with a massive 'find' of £140000! of which we had about ten per cent! I think many at that stage thought the reality of the project had gone beyond our means although cautious optimism still prevailed Never worry we were told there are all sorts of organisations out there who will gladly throw money your way - all you have to do is ask!



The foundations being constructed

Phase One completed - let the money raising begin. In the Autumn of 2006 dozens of letters were written and phone calls made followed by the completion of page after page of application forms. Thank heaven for the computer without which this task would have been impossible. We fairly quickly had positive responses from CA, Conwy Voluntary Services Bureau and Welsh Church Acts Fund. This still only provided a small proportion of our total and with the bigger applications it was a question of wait, wait, and wait. Meanwhile we had not been idle on the home front running all sorts of fund-raising events; talking to local councils, Rotary Clubs and the like; companies large and small etc.etc. Most importantly to the local and wider community through our Buy-a-Brick fund which would eventually produce almost £3500 through the kindness of so many people. Then one by one the biggies responded. Lottery Fund - no; Sports Council for Wales - no; Aggregate Levy - no; Communities and Facilities Fund - no. We were in despair. All gave their reasons for refusal and hinted that re-applications might be considered so we went to work, re-applied and again we waited. Lottery Fund's answer was a definite no and do not apply again; Sports Council the same. Aggregate Levy did

not accept that we were so adversely affected by the neighbouring quarry that we warranted a grant.

Our hopes of progress now hung on the Welsh Assembly. One of their original reasons for declining had been that we had not proved to their satisfaction that the wider community wanted this development. Part of the re-submission was a petition whereby in the space of one month we had secured over 400 signatures from people all over North Wales supporting our application. Oh joy; on 7th August 2007 I received a phone call from Communities & Facilities saying a grant of £84,000 had been approved. But, we now had a deadline - the grant would time-expire in twelve months if the project was not started by August 2008. We were more determined than ever to succeed.

Almost a year had passed since the tender stage and the successful builders were forced to put on an inflationary increase on their price of 8%. In conjunction with the Architects we went through the spec. with a fine tooth comb taking out those items not considered essential to the success of the project. Despite our efforts we still needed to raise £18,500! A final push was needed. Members were offered the chance to purchase life membership at £400 a time and bless their hearts 21 responded. Other gifts and donations had come in until the black hole stood at £8500. We really could think of nowhere else to go and in desperation I threw



Work in progress

ourselves unto the kindness of the Welsh Assembly - having got so far would they please help us across the winning line. A week later, to our unbounded joy came a phone call to say they would bridge the gap. This was in February 2008 - just less than two years after our project began we were in a position to instruct our builders, W.F.Clayton & Co Ltd of Bangor to start work. Work began on 3rd March. It would be too boring to describe every moment but some stick in our memories. Almost immediately we had a delay of three weeks - the Piling Contractors had lost some of their equipment during flooding in another part of the country and could not start on the promised date. We needed to move our portacabin so that we had a home throughout the summer. We engaged two Giant fork lift machines who between them lifted and waltzed the cabin across the grass to its new position like some incredible Contractors Come Dancing performance which was exciting to watch. Then came the tediously slow and intricate work of piling and constructing by hand the wire mesh base to form the reinforced foundation. After this things happened with amazing speed; the walls went up, the roof timbers seemed to grow in no time; then the slates appeared and we had a building. Time for patience though



play in progress at the novice golf croquet event

as the internal fitting out would take an equal length of time before we could think of using it. And when we thought we were there more delays and expense. Those who had promised to take away our old portacabin pulled out giving us more delay and cost while we organised its demolition and the good old utility company said it would be another month before they could connect up our electricity supply. Finally everything was done and by the first week in October, seven months after construction started, we had our beautiful new clubhouse of grey rendered walls, maroon paintwork and Welsh slate roof for the members, visitors and the local population, to enjoy.

What are my thoughts of the last two and a half years? Well we have proved that there are groups out there who will help but it involves a lot of hard graft and I learnt you must never take the first 'no' as final. The amount of work involved is horrendous in terms of form filling, phone calls and meetings; never attempt this unless you have the use of a computer: and never take no as the final answer.

The good will and desire to help of the community, voluntary groups, small businesses, councillors - indeed the majority of people we have come across, is amazing and the pleasure they share with you when the whole thing turns out well makes it all worthwhile. And of course the support of the club members who throughout have been wonderfully enthusiastic and without whom we would not have achieved the marvellous asset we now possess.

For the record the sums involved and sources of funds are set out below:

Welsh Assembly: Community Facilities & Activities Fund £93,187
 Conwy County Borough Council £10,000
 Croquet Association £ 5,000
 Conwy Voluntary Services £ 2,500
 Welsh Church Act Fund £ 1,500
 Buy-a-Brick Fund £ 3,500
 Other Donations and Capital Reserve £10,547
 Total £126,234

Add to this the professional fees paid by the club which amounted to some £6,000 and the scale of the achievement becomes clear. Thank you all who contributed and we hope that many who read this will be able at some time to give us a visit.



ANGMERING CROQUET CLUB AT HAM MANOR

Report by David Vallis

Within a private estate located at the foot of the South Downs and adjacent to the small village of Angmering in West Sussex, you will find the Ham Manor Golf Club and within those grounds you will discover the Angmering Croquet Club. This new Club began playing in April 2008 as a result of the combined vision of the Ham Manor Golf Club management, initial Croquet members, and not least, the immensely valued guidance and support of Michael Hague (South East Croquet Federation Area Development Officer), and of course the Croquet Association.

We have the use of three lawns located in sight of the Grade 11 listed Georgian manor house with the additional pleasure of beautiful surroundings set within protected tree specimens, rhododendrons in season and occasional sightings of wild life.

It has been particularly satisfying to see our numbers quickly increase with the arrival of an encouraging stream of new members who are thoroughly enjoying the club and making good progress in the development of their Croquet skills. However it quickly became a necessity soon after our beginning to build a new storage hut. Fortunately, the Ham Manor management recognised our difficulties and quickly produced the necessary base for our hut. A grant application to the CA Development Committee for £730 for part of the hut cost only was speedily agreed. Our storage hut finally arrived on the 18th of June, so that we no longer have to carry the equipment from the small storage unit at Ham Manor to the lawns and also have somewhere to shelter in adverse weather.

Competition Time

Find the odd ball out.

George was a much-loved member of the long-established Much Blobbing Croquet Club. He was also a mathematician with a reputation for lateral thinking.

One rainy afternoon he was on his own in the clubhouse and decided to spring-clean the cupboard where old equipment

ended up. He found a box that he'd never seen before with 13 old wooden croquet balls all looking the same size, and in remarkably good condition. There was a little note inside which read as follows: "One of these balls was alleged to be different in weight from the others. We got an old balance and checked them out confirming that all but one were the same weight before the balance bar broke, so we were unable to check the 13th."

Sure enough, among the other junk George could see a large old balance with a broken bar. He looked to see if there was any way to identify which was the 13th unchecked ball – no joy.

George remembered as a schoolboy being set a puzzle about 12 balls, one of which was lighter or heavier than the others. The challenge was to specify how the odd one out could be found in three weighings of a balance. He'd found a solution to that quite quickly and claimed the usual prize of a Mars Bar from the Maths teacher. But he remembered thinking at the time that there were 27 possible outcomes of 3 weighings and that the puzzle only required 24 of them. In the enthusiasm of youth he'd moved on to other things and never explored this further. Now was the time. He could jury-rig a balance bar quite easily, and of course then do as many weighings as he liked, but the mathematician in him would not cheat. How could he do it in 3 weighings?

He took a bit of time to think about it. Then he sprang into action, first making a suitable balance bar and fitted the scale trays, and checking that they hung level when empty. He marked each ball discretely so that he could distinguish them. He then did the three weighings, each with a carefully selected set of balls in one side and another carefully selected set in the other. The results of the three weighings told him whether there was an odd ball, and if so, exactly which and whether it was heavier or lighter.

How did George do it? Answers to the Editor by 20th May 2009 First original and correct answer drawn wins a voucher for £10 to spend at the Croquet Shop. The Editor's decision is final.

Report of Council Meeting

Report of March Council Meeting By Ian Vincent

Council met on 28th March at Hurlingham with glorious spring sunshine outside. Patricia Duke-Cox, the Chairman, cunningly sat opposite the mirror not to admire the lawns, but so that she could see hands raised on both sides of the table. In opening the meeting she welcomed Cliff Jones back after his illness.

Bernard Neal, the President, informed the meeting that he intended to retire with effect from the AGM, because he felt he no longer had the stamina required to meet the exceptional demands of hosting the MacRobertson Shield. Patricia expressed Council's regret at, but understanding of, his decision. Roger Bray proposed that he should be accorded the title of Past President and invited to attend Council meetings.

Jonathan Isaacs gave notice that he also intended to resign from Council at the AGM and it was Julian Tonk's last meeting as Representative of the Northern Federation.

The 2008 accounts were approved for submission to the AGM and the 2009 budget confirmed. Although 2010 looks as though it may be a difficult year, it was decided not to increase subscriptions, though entry and course fees may be reviewed later this year. Half the cost of the office extension will be met from the Benefactors' Fund.

The office extension is now in use and the office staff were thanked for their forbearance during the work.

A number of items from committees were reported by Barry Keen, the Chairman

of the Management Committee:

a) Coaching courses are to be opened to non-Associates, but at extra cost and only if there are spaces after priority booking for Associates.

b) The guidelines for the automatic handicapping system are being revised to include more games, particularly those involving overseas players.

c) Motions about drugs policy, the MacRobertson Shield and World Team Championship, and common processes for changes to AC Laws and GC Rules have been submitted to the WCF Council meeting in May.

d) John Spiers has donated a trophy for the most improved Golf Croquet player each year and is organising, and underwriting a major part of the cost of, a bid to hold a Golf Croquet World Championship at Hurlingham and Surbiton in 2011.

e) Hoop specifications are to be relaxed to allow 3/4" uprights.

A report from the Juniors Working Party was considered and its recommendations, including mentoring and a bursary scheme, adopted.

Amendments to the CA Constitution will be proposed at the AGM so that Individual Associates no longer need to be elected and Regional Representatives are renamed Federation Representatives, to reflect common usage.

Percival Mallets

Hand crafted wooden mallets with Carbon or Ash shafts, any weight, length or size made to your own specifications. Adjustable weight range +/- 2 ozs, variety of grips and peripheral weighting available. Mallets altered, repaired and upgraded.

Contact Michael Percival on 07780677943 or Michael@croquetmallets.co.uk (or .com) web page www.croquetmallets.co.uk

All mallets still at 2007 prices

C.A. News

Nominations for Election or Notices of Motions for the 2009 AGM

Any nominations for the posts of President, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary or membership of the Council, or motions to be put to the AGM, should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Dr. I. G. Vincent, 29, Thoresby Road, Bramcote, Nottingham NG9 3EN, by 1st June. Nominations should give the name of the candidate together with those of the proposer and seconder, and the consent of the candidate should have been obtained.

Updates to Tournament Regulations

The 2009 revision of the tournament regulations has taken place and the updated version (thanks to Samir Patel) should be on the website by the time this is published. As usual, it starts with a summary of the changes. Most of them are corrections, or regularize existing practice, such as asking a bystander to mark where your ball goes off the lawn, but a few may affect players more directly.

Incorrect Handicaps

The issue of games played with the wrong number of bisques mentioned on p20 of the December Gazette was considered again and it was decided that players should be jointly responsible for agreeing the number of bisques to be given, asking each other for their handicaps, rather than relying on published lists. Mistakes cannot be corrected once the game has started and the result stands (the complications of doing so fairly were felt to be too great, and there may not be time to restart the game). Only if a player claims too high a handicap are they liable to be disqualified. In a knock-out, they would be, but in a Swiss or American Block they may be allowed to continue playing at their incorrect handicap, but may not win any prize.

Using bisques when time expires

As mentioned in the December article, you have to play an extra turn or the first stroke of a bisque, not just claim it, to be allowed to do so before time is called

Non-white team strips

Non-white team strips are permitted, provided that all members of the team wear either them or white.

Experimental Laws

The temporary variations of the laws for top-level play have been revised since that published on page 8 for the February issue, and are to be found in Appendix 5 of the regulations. The only substantive changes (as opposed to tidying up the wording) are to

the eligibility for a free placement (the initial proposal was that a player who conceded the option of a free placement also lost his entitlement to one, the current one is that a free placement is no longer available after any ball has been pegged out) and that the movement of the first ball played to baulk if it does not go off, hit or pass through a hoop, or hit the peg, is at the adversary's option.

Coaching Committee

2008 Coaching Award

The Coach of the Year award has not been made this year. Instead, a Lifetime Coaching Award is to be made to Cliff Jones of Honiton. Cliff has coached in various parts of the country over many years and this award recognises the innovations he has made during that time. In the normal course of events, the presentation will be made at the forthcoming CAAGM, and the citation will be published in due course.

Insurance for private coaching

The CA public liability insurance carried by member clubs covers coaches for their regular courses. A coach who undertakes private coaching for a fee may need extra cover. The CA is willing to arrange this through its Brokers for a fee of £100 per annum. Anyone interested should contact the CA Manager.

Child Protection Advice for Coaches

Last season, Pamela Mason of Sussex CCC helpfully provided guidance to be offered to new coaches concerning the protection of children and vulnerable adults. For 2009, some small amendments have been made at the suggestion of Jean Hargreaves of Bury CC. Coaching Committee are grateful to both Pamela and Jean and intend to make the advice available on the CA website.

Golf Croquet jargon

At the instigation of the Coaching Committee, a list of definitions for terms commonly used in Golf Croquet has been added to the CA website.

New coaches

Congratulations to the 51 coaches who qualified in 2008. Most of you will be added to the CA coaches' database shortly. A few Club Coaches are not yet Members of the CA: they will be added to the database when they have joined.

Lawrence Whittaker, Chairman, Coaching Committee

Our Sporting Life

by Ian Vincent

Last November, the Sports Heritage Network launched an initiative called "Our Sporting Life". The event took place in the Long Room of Lord's Cricket Ground and our President, Bernard Neal, kindly invited me to accompany him. Bernard responded to the invitation to bring an iconic sporting object by lugging the MacRobertson Shield up from Cheltenham: a heroic achievement in itself! He was probably the only person present whose name was on one of the objects displayed, which included the Ashes, a cup presented to Fred Perry, Frankie Detorri's riding boots and one of the first medals awarded to a footballer, by the Everton club.

After a welcome on behalf of the MCC, Paul Mains, Chairman of the Sports Heritage Network, outlined the four phases of the project. The initial phase is to build momentum and to recruit sporting and regional partners. The public launch will be in spring, 2009, giving a three year build-up to the Olympics in 2012. The second phase, in 2010, will consist of a number of local exhibitions of sporting artifacts and memorabilia. The third phase, in 2011, will be a touring exhibition, which will return to London for the final phase in 2012.

They are apparently aware of about 400 collections of sporting objects. As well as artifacts themselves, they are interested in people and their relationship with them, and in personal stories of sporting inspiration.

The three main aims of the project are:

1. To remind sports about their own heritage and their responsibility to care for it.
2. To engage with the cultural world, emphasising the relevance of sport to it.
3. To rejoice in the international dimension of sport.

Funding will be required for each stage and The Telegraph and SBI (a sports consultancy) will be assisting with procuring this.

Lord Moynihan, Chairman of the British Olympic Association, then described the background to the 1908 games, which were held in London after Mt. Vesuvius disrupted Italy's plans, on the back of a major cultural and trade festival, which 8.4M people attended. He also spoke about the importance of using sporting history to inspire young people, and announced that the projected had been awarded the "Inspire Mark". He concluded by mentioning the importance of sporting ethos, noting that the BOC regulations were based on those of Henley, whose events were adjudicated by the Stewards, not the President and his cronies, and pledging the BOC's support for the initiative.

Ann Cutcliffe, Vice-Chairman of Paralympics GB, spoke of the inspiration sport can give to disabled people and their carers.

The final speaker, Jonathan Edwards, provided some light relief and then answered his rhetorical question about the meaning of sport by noting that in ancient Greece it had a strong religious aspect and provided a picture of the need to strive in life.

So why am I telling you all this? The project is asking people to fill in cards (we have been promised a supply), or a form on its website, <http://www.oursportinglife.co.uk>, to record both a nationally known example of our sporting heritage and a personal or community sporting memory that had inspired them. In both cases, the relevant sport is to be identified (and croquet is on the list) and responses will be forwarded to representatives of that sport and the relevant region. With the MacRobertson Shield coming here next year, and croquet's ethos as an amateur sport with a high degree of trust between the players, this is perhaps an opportunity to get some good publicity.

News & Information

WCF Team Rankings Announced

WCF released the latest WCF Team Ranking lists for Association and Golf Croquet this month.

New Zealand makes the headlines this last quarter. In AC they are now equal second place with Australia, whilst in GC they have taken over third place from them.

England continues to dominate AC, with Egypt remaining as the top team in GC.

With the Northern Hemisphere season just started, competition will continue to be fierce.

In May 2009, the WCF FULL member associations will be debating the merits of forming a fully integrated WCF World AC Team Championship based around the centrepiece of the "MacRobertson Shield".

Full details of the rankings together with an introduction can be found at <http://www.wcfcroquet.org/Rankings/teamranking.php>

Women's 3rd WCF Golf Croquet World Championships

After consultation with member associations, the World Croquet Federation today released details of the allocated places for each member association for the forthcoming, "3rd WCF Women's World Golf Croquet Championship" to be held in Cairnlea, Victoria, Australia 21st to 28th November 2009.

Member Allocation: Australia 9, Egypt 5, England 2, Ireland 1, Italy 1, New Zealand 6, Scotland 1, South Africa 3, Switzerland 1, USA 3.

In addition to the above allocations:
 · the four semi-finalists from the last event in Dublin, Ireland will be invited to participate;
 · there will be four wild card places for selection by WCF.
 Total entry: 40 players.

Sweden joins WCF

The World Croquet Federation (WCF) has much pleasure in announcing that the Svenska Kroquetförbundet (SKF) (Sweden Croquet Association) has been admitted to Associate Membership by the agreement of the WCF Management Committee, subject to eventual ratification by the Full voting membership.

The ratification proposal will be made on 12th May 2009 at the next WCF General (Council) Meeting to be held at West Palm Beach, Florida, USA at 8.00pm that day.

The Swedish Croquet Association was founded in Stockholm 1985 and at that time only the Swedish version of croquet was played.

In 1998 the first Swedish national championship was played. The following year the first Swedish national championship in Association Croquet was played and latterly Golf Croquet also.

In 2008 a real upswing for Swedish croquet took place when Anton Varnäs built four full size croquet lawns in Eskilstuna where

the national championships are played. It is hoped the venue will be used for future Swedish Open Championships and possibly international competitions.

Sweden has been represented in the international championships since 2003 with the following as best results:

- 2006: 15th in the golf croquet world championships
- 2007: Plate win in the team European championships
- 2007: Plate win and fifth place in the association croquet European championships

The Swedish Croquet Association currently consists of 16 clubs with about 100 members.

Ulf Söderberg, President of the Swedish Croquet Association said, "The Swedish Croquet Association's main cause is to promote and administer the croquet sport in Sweden and also represent the sport out of the country and also help croquet being available for everybody."



A photo taken at the preview of '100 years of croquet at Littlehampton' exhibition.

100 years of croquet at Littlehampton

Littlehampton Croquet club are gearing up to celebrate their centenary during the forthcoming season.

Together with the Littlehampton museum they kicked off with an exhibition following the progress of the club over the past 100 years.

They have issued invitations to other clubs in West Sussex to

THE CROQUET CLUB OF CORFU 2009 TOURNAMENTS



ASSOCIATION OPEN 7 - 16th SEPTEMBER
 Contact **Bob Stephens** for details
 (bobstephens@talktalk.net)

GOLF OPEN 21 - 30 SEPTEMBER
 Contact **Michael Hague** for details
 (haque_m1@sky.com)

compete for the Centenary Challenge Cup for Golf Croquet, donated by Chairman Lilian Holdsworth.

Investing in Japan

The World Croquet Federation has made its first ever award to the Japan Croquet Association with the funding of £1,600 (GBP) for the purchase of croquet mallets and balls.

Two years ago, to increase efficiency and concentrate effort, four clubs in different locations were amalgamated into one bigger one comprising of two artificial surface lawns based in a state park in Tokyo, Japan.

With a playing base of 40 players, there is an active membership of 10 – 20 players playing each week.

As part of their own development process, they hold three or four large events year where they attract up to a total of 1,000 people who are eager to learn the Association and Golf variants.

All told, the Japan CA are investing a total of £4,000 (GBP) (including the WCF grant aid) in the sport with the refurbishment of the artificial surfaces and surrounding infrastructure.

The new mallets and balls will ensure that they have every chance of securing a larger membership base in Japan.

Cornwall Croquet Club offers far country membership

Players from "up country" who are regulars in Cornwall may be interested to know that Cornwall Croquet Club now offers "far country" membership to those resident outside Cornwall. The subscription rate is £35 per year. The Club is situated on the outskirts of St. Austell in mid-Cornwall, and has two full sized courts, clubhouse, and parking. Association & Golf croquet is played. Further information can be obtained from our Secretary Lynda Everett - Llyn1945@aol.com, or Chairman Ron George ronpam.george@tiscali.net, or from the website, [Cornwall-Croquet.org.uk](http://www.Cornwall-Croquet.org.uk).

Change to Office Staff

Liz Budworth is taking a leave of absence from the office for a few months while she looks after her husband, Richard, who is not well. Sue Edwards has stepped into the breach over this period, so Sue will be the first point of contact for details on membership, tournaments etc. We wish Liz and Richard well and welcome Sue on board.

Coaching Tips

The Editor is requesting that players of all abilities, from both Association and Golf croquet get in touch with their own personal tips on how they have improved their play or perhaps pass on something that they have learned. Croquet is a very individual sport and while all of the various coaching books and manuals offer sound advice, sometimes with a little application or perhaps even good fortune we stumble across something that just works, so if that's the case for you or you would just like to offer some advice to fellow players, please get in touch. It could be 50 words, it could be 500, but please include your handicap and length of time you have been playing croquet with any tips you pass on.

The Lighter Side of Croquet

The Croquet Diary of an Improving Player

By Anon of Bedfordshire

As an improving player and tournament nervous, I have decided to have a go, pick up tips, and watch more experienced players.

Day 1. I am well into a good break when the ball misses the hoop, bounces off the wire and stops at an angle, but its not that difficult, so I decide to take a bisque. The opposition, Will Peters, asks for a referee to watch the next shot. Referee happens to be 'The Wife'. Guess what, yes you got it, I played a foul shot! What a waste of a bisque.

I could inform the CA and insist that co-habiting partners in any form DO NOT referee for each other.

Day 2. Today's opponent for me is Billy the Belt. He informs me he is the low handicapper, so it is his right to toss the coin. He wins and decides to go in first. He tells me to find some bisques to build my fence. By the time I get back one of his balls is missing, where can it be? He's only started without me, ran hoop one from the yard line up to hoop two, ran that and then played in front of three. Why the urgency? I ask. "Well with it being a timed game and you having 'a fence', I thought I better get on with it." At this rate the fence will be no 'defence' I think to myself.

Perhaps I'll tell the CA I find the term 'fence' offensive.

Day 3. Billy the Belt seems well set for winning against Will

Peters, providing 'The Wife' isn't refereeing. I think he is royalist, he constantly whistles Queen's 'We are the Champions' and when Will hits and then misses the hoop, Billy guffaws and slaps his thigh so loudly, players in the next county jump out of their skin. His feeble excuse is that he is listening to 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue' on his ipod. He's right about one thing, he hasn't a clue, it's a walkman.

I think I'll suggest to the CA that body mass index should be measured before matches to stop thunder thighs being used as drums.

Day 4. New player Perry Merry, not much idea as to life skills or conventional croquet, is winning everything easily. Mutterings and mumblings are coming from the direction of the 'Big Boys', all clad in sparkling whites straight from the CA shop. This isn't on their agenda, what can they do about it? That's it, Perry Merry's gear. He's quite a sight, or fright, in his yellowing tight-fitting polo neck, 3 sizes too small, snagged and yellowing nylon, and embarrassingly short shorts, together with yellow Slazenger canvas tennis shoes, that were probably a present for passing his 11+.

The 'Big Boys' decide to scare Perry Merry and say that CA insists on whites, not yellows in tournaments, and unless he conforms to the dress code, he's out.

Day 5. Perry Merry takes no offence and obligingly treats himself to a gleaming snow-white fleece, hiding his yellowing polo-neck and shots. Now they are sniggering he's 'Perry No Strides'

Someone does love Perry though, she is red-ribboned, non-judgemental and enjoys accompanying him to tournaments. She is a Scuff, the scruffy, sharp-clawed poodle bitch. Perry's winning streak continues on throughout the week and he finally wins the 'Marie Celeste' silver plate for the most promising newcomer. Scuff is ecstatic, bounding all over the sacred turf, so Perry tries to calm her down. He opens a can of pedigree chum, empties it onto the silver salver, Scuff devours it, sees her face in the plate and attacks it with her claws, which instantly erases the three previous winners.

Mutterings are heard regarding the appropriate care of CA trophies.

Event over. Nerves steadied and gamesmanship noted, I have now sent off my entries for 2009 and await this season's lessons.

'Arlif Pool' An Alternative History of Croquet's Origins

By Klim Seabright

Recent research now suggests that Croquet did not have its origins in Ireland or France, but in the Forest of Dean! Perhaps I should explain....

I have recently been carrying out research into open-caste coal mining in the Forest which, rather like tin mining in Cornwall, used to be one of the main sources of income for the Foresters. I had been given access to an Archive, the location of which I am not allowed to reveal, save to say it is "somewhere near" the Arlif Pool deep in the Forest. I was particularly interested in any link between the mines and the nearby National Coal Research Establishment (NCRE). Being a croquet player I was aware that the NCRE had a long standing link with Croquet and it was among some papers related to "Bronowski Popers" that I found several references to phrases now used in Croquet.

The Forest of Dean is the subject of many myths and legends which include, supposedly, sightings of a white bear, unicorn and even a Yeti! One must therefore be quite careful about drawing too many conclusions which are not based on primary evidence.

Having blown the dust from one very old and rather brittle document I discovered the following sentence "once ye coale has been subejected to the burning emberers for two phases of ye moon 'tis changed to coke. The cokes sackies shall then be carried by the PID-COKE CARRIERS to ye drays to go for ye coke barges at Gloster". "Pid" seems to have had its origins in the Mediaeval French word for "feet" or "walking" so we have the Coke Carriers known as "Pidcokes". Readers will understand that I have inserted some of my own punctuation since little existed at that time and what did exist tended to be randomly applied.

About two weeks later I was trying to find evidence that the Forest coal was definitely used for the first steam ships, when I came across an indication of a kind of job title for employees taken on by mine owners as "PIDCOKES". Usually these jobs were handed down from father to son. There was a requirement to "bear ye brass studied carrying yoke across ye shoulders and werin the brass knobbed boots at ye feet- naught colour save blacke should be worn between ye brasse bits". The Pidcokes essentially laboured for the Forest Dwellers Location Groups (FDLGs) but were engaged by the mine owners.

Intrigued by now, I started to search for other evidence of the early existence of our game. Here I would say that I found some evidence of differing games based mainly on FDLGs but, no matter how I tried, I could find no suggestion of ill treatment or abuse between differing FDLGs. Much to my surprise and against my understanding of anthropological norms, which suggest constant war between tribes, it seems that the FDLGs appear to have operated a "live and let live" kind of existence between differing codes!

My next find was a document which contained many references to a "Rover" or "Roverey". I referred this evidence to Professor Wunbach, who is an expert in mine working in ancient and medieval civilisations at the University of Lower Saxony. He informed me that many Forest/Mining cultures employed a Rover/Roverey/Rovering whose role was to "rove" from mine to mine to ensure that goods had a kind of quality check before being allowed to finally leave the mine or forest. He further postulated that the name was a reference to the person constantly moving around the Forest to carry out his duties.

Apparently after a barge load of coal had been turned to coke by a particular FDLG the Pidcoke would arrange for the Rover to visit. The Pidcoke (when not lifting and carrying) would go to a spot in the Forest known only to him and the Roverey, where he would leave a coloured wood (Red, Yellow, Blue or Black). This would tell the Roverey which FDLG required his services. Each FDLG had its own coloured wood - expanded to white, pink, green or brown as FDLGs became more numerous. I was beginning to feel that this was all too much of a coincidence to ignore when I happened upon a final piece of convincing evidence.

It appears that that the Rover was employed by the Land/Mine owner and certain documents recovered indicate that the landowners rewarded the Rovers by giving them exclusive rites to truffle extraction in the Forest. For this the master would provide the Roverey with a specially trained pig, which was kept in a crude sty near the centre of the Forest. The Rover would share this bounty with the FDLGs through the Pidcokes. At some time in the spring (around the beginning of April) the Roverey detected changing conditions in the earth heralding the maturing of the truffles. Somehow this message would be conveyed to the Foresters and a kind of inter-tribal game was played. The Roverey would tie his Pig to the Peg near the sty and the signal for a kind of game to be played between FDLGs. This was a time of high excitement in the Forest

and much leg pulling between groups. The first FDLG to grab the pig would race around with the pig mocking other tribes with a cry of "Pig/Peg Out, Pig/Peg Out". Other FDLGs would then attempt to steal the pig by rolling the coloured discs at anyone from a rival FDLG. And so an early version of croquet was born.

So there we have it. References to Pidcokes, coloured discs and pig/peg out. It can only be hoped that the Council of the CA will immediately despatch the Development Committee to re-establish our ancient game deep in the Forest of Dean - but they should avoid the start of April and watch out that the White Bear doesn't get them!

Tournaments



Mike Russ hand over the Speed Croquet Clocks to club President Bernard Neal while club members look on. Photo by Klim Seabright

Speed Croquet - Cheltenham

by Klim Seabright

I am going to describe a recent tournament at Cheltenham Croquet Club and suggest that any purists who are of a particularly sensitive nature might wish to "look away now" for approximately the time it will take to read this article.

Les and Alwen Bowker had obviously enjoyed their Speed Croquet experience at Surbiton so much that they persuaded the Cheltenham Committee to allow them to run a similar event on the hallowed Old Bath Road lawns, "in the Deep Mid Winter". They resolutely refused however to confirm their choice of fancy dress costume at Surbiton, and so the rumour that Les had sewn on all his own sequins remains just that...a rumour!

Les had come up with a prototype chess clock containing an assortment of kit more usually found in a school physics laboratory. The clock could probably best be described as an "Apprentice Piece". Over then to the club's master craftsman, Mike Russ, who refined the design and provided the requisite number of clocks for the competition. The clocks were of such good quality that they would have undoubtedly caused local hero Arthur Negus (had he not gone to the great auction room in the sky many years ago) to utter those immortal words, "just look at the craftsmanship in that!" as he stroked the item lovingly with the back of his hand.

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The 12 intrepid pioneers met on a beautifully clear winter's day to take part in five games of 14 point doubles (25 minutes per pair). One player, who hadn't quite got the gist of it, was asked to remove his running spikes, although everyone admired the way he had applied the dubbin and waxed the laces for the occasion.

Before play commenced Les gave an excellent demonstration of the clock and a brief description of the rules. Although croquet players, being what they are, were asking questions in the first game which Les had actually answered in the briefing? So "what's new?" I hear all you Managers out there say!

Three games were played before lunch, when a pause was taken to wash the food down with a glass of much needed mulled wine -25 minutes of course!

The winners of this inaugural event were Alwen Bowker and Keith Davis. Everyone felt it appropriate that Alwen had won but were amazed that she should achieved this when partnered by Keith. He is an excellent player but has never denied the story that he was heard to shout "slow down" at the Tortoise, in that very well know race with the Hare. They won four of their five games and are looking for sponsors for next season (Speedo perhaps)?

The Speed Achievement Award of the day must surely have gone to Peter Stone who had just 12 seconds to run hoops 5, 6 and peg out, a feat he managed with one second to spare! He was therefore awarded the Linford Christie Trophy (a large lunch box carefully packed by the caterers).

Everyone agreed that this had been an excellent tournament played in a good spirit. There almost certainly needs to be some amendments to the CA Coaching Manual. Instruction is required in such phrases as "get on with it", "get off the lawn now" and "switch the clock". There needs to be a programme to increase fitness to ensure that the non-player is doing all the correct things both on and off the lawn. The non-playing partner needs to anticipate where the balls will end up, which is particularly difficult after a miss hit cut- rush. Standing in the correct off-lawn place is also particularly important. There needs to be a continuous off court conversation by the out-playing pair so that no time is wasted when it becomes their turn. And... as I learned to my cost having arrived quickly over my ball only to find that I had no mallet,... keep the thing in your hand at all times!

The 12 players were all of a good standard and this therefore acted as a good trial competition for the club with everyone making suggestions and adding comments about future such play. Speed Croquet might even become a regular part of the season.

On a slightly serious note it would be a good thing to find a way to ensure that Speed Croquet is "inclusive" and all who want to play are able to do so. Maybe some kind of time adjustment could be applied? Perhaps play could be divided into age groupings? There are certainly enough mathematically inclined croquet players around who could come up with a reasonable solution.

It was certainly a fun day and everyone stated that they would be back for more!

The Jacksons Jersey Croquet Championship 2nd - 5th April 2009

Report by Gavin Carter

The Jacksons Jersey Croquet Championship was held in glorious sunshine at the Jersey Croquet Club last weekend. Although the lawns were in excellent condition, the easy pace (around 10 Plummers) mixed with 5 players in the World top



Keith Aiton, triumphant at Jersey. Photo by Gavin Carter.

20, led to a peeling frenzy in both the doubles and singles events.

The best of five quarter finals were all one-sided matches with 3-0 victories for each of the seeds. This set up two intriguing semi-finals matching one player having played throughout the winter months and one with very little recent play. This proved to be decisive in both matches. Stephen Mulliner beat Rutger Beijderwellen in one semi and with Keith Aiton leading David Maugham 2-0 in the other before David having to retire with a wrist injury in the third.

With easy playing conditions for the final, the only difference on the day between the two inform players was Keith's remarkable straight hitting as he beat Stephen 3-1 to take the £300 winner's cheque.

The doubles event also saw Keith in the money. Playing with Tony Le Moingan, they overcame Stephen and Gavin Carter 2-0 in the final with a solid +17Tp (K) and +26Sxp (K) win.

This highly sociable tournament along with excellent lawns, weather and food was enjoyed by all and a great start to a new season.

Singles Scores
 Stephen Mulliner beat James Hopgood +25tp, +26sxp
 Keith Aiton beat Cliff Jones +26tp, +26sxp
 Rutger Beijderwellen beat Gavin Carter +12tp, +26tp, +26tp
 Stephen beat Simon Williams +26tp, +20, +26tp
 Keith beat Tony Le Moignan +19sxp, +26tp, +14sxp
 David Maugham beat Richard Griffiths +26tp, +26tp, +19
 Stephen beat Rutger +21sxp, +10tp, -26tp, +26tp
 Keith beat Dave +3sxp, +26tp, R/H
 Keith beat Stephen +26tp, -25tp, +13tp, +26qp

Lancashire Open Golf Croquet Championship 4th - 5th April 2009, Heaton Park

Report by Geoff Young

The winner of the 2009 Lancashire Open Golf Croquet Championship was David Walters, with a gripping 7-4 3-7 7-3 victory over Tim King. The Heaton Park lawns were playing very well on a fine spring weekend. The twenty entrants played eight games each on the Saturday without time limits, double banked in ten rounds on four courts. The KO phase for top four in each block went:

Walters beat Ray Mounfield 7-6 7-4
 Brian Story beat Freda Vitty 7-5 7-4

Ian Lines beat Paul Rigge 7-5 7-6
 Tim King beat Derek Buxton 7-6 7-5
 Walters beat Storey 7-6 7-4
 King beat Lines 7-6 7-3
 Walters beat King 7-4 3-7 7-3
 Losers' playoffs
 For third place Lines beat Storey 10-6
 Vitty beat Mounfield 3-7 7-6 7-2
 Rigge beat Buxton 7-2 2-7 7-3
 5th to 8th not played

Consolation doubles Richard Thompson and Anne Connop won 5/5 in round robin.



David Walters on his way to winning the Lancashire Open Golf Croquet Championship. Photo by Tom Weston.

Astroturf 2009, Coors Cup and Bass Shield Report by Ray Mounfield

This year's competition, which is sponsored by Coors, was held at Shobnall, Burton-on-Trent, on Sunday 8th March. Arrangements had been made for an earlier start, with play actually getting underway as planned at 10.30am. There were eight teams of three, representing six different East Midland Federation Clubs, and we were graced with the presence, as competitors, of the C.A. Chairman of Council, Patricia Duke-Cox, and GC Laws and Tournament Chairman, Tim King. Initially it looked as if the weather might be kind (for a third consecutive year!) but it quickly turned nasty and we had to contend with rain, sleet and frequent gusts of wind.

The preliminary block play saw the current holders of the team trophy, Southwell, heading Block "A", with relative newcomers, Sapcote, in runner-up place. Block "B" was headed by a Nottingham team which included two junior players, with Ashby "A" as runners-up. The Nottingham juniors Will Gee and Rachel Rowe had each won all three of their games and were fancied to win the individual competition.

The afternoon's play produced some interesting results, with the Sapcote team losing only one game and emerging as convincing winners of the Bass Shield. Ashby "A" narrowly beat Southwell and Nottingham for runner-up place. With three afternoon wins to add to two from the morning, the individual competition, the Coors Cup, went to Tim King. Three players, William Gee, David Lambert



The winning Sapcote team of David Lambert, Pat Wright and John Hansen receiving the Bass Shield from tournament manager Ray Mounfield. Photo by Richard Sanville.

(Sapcote) and Tim Robson (Southwell) each finished on four wins and a draw.

Ashby "B" won the afternoon block play involving teams that had failed to make the cut with Woodhall Spa and Bakewell finishing in joint sixth place.

Despite the weather everyone enjoyed their early season croquet outing and the courts at Shobnall are already booked for the 2010 competition.

Surbiton Easter Handicap 12th -13th April 2009 Report by Kevin Carter

Fine weather and great lawns (c11 Plummers) meant that some players got in nine or ten games during this two-day Spring warm-up. It helped that the first games each day started by 9.30 - the benefit of having the last four to arrive being given a late start.

However, the result was settled not long after lunch on the second day. The winner was Rutger, just ahead of last year's winner, Chris Farthing. Rutger tried several SXPs, completing one and also a QNP. Rutger and Chris were two of half a dozen players getting in practice for the World Championship (ten Surbiton members will compete in it).

At the other end of the scale it was good to see some B-level players entering the fray. Jon Diamond (from Tunbridge Wells and playing off 3.5) did especially well, with 4/7. A flurry of handicap changes included Mike Town reaching scratch for the first time - the result perhaps of retirement providing him more time for croquet these days.

Please send all tournament reports and photos to news@croquet.org.uk

this ensures that your contributions go to the website and the Gazette.

If you upload your own news or tournament reports please remember to forward to the Gazette.

COACHING

As it's the start of the season then I feel it's even more appropriate to have coaching material in the Gazette. Last years beginners are hungry to improve their play and those of you who are just waking to the new season could probably benefit, consciously or not, from some advice from those willing to offer it.

I have tried, believe me I have tried, to solicit new material, but it's like drawing out Aunt Emma's last bisque, so I make no apologies for delving into the Editorial library of back issues for some gems, which I believe are relevant to players of varying handicaps/ experience.

The first piece is by Don Gaunt and was originally published in Issue 239, September 1995, as part of a series titled 'Helpful Hints'.

Helpful Hints

By Don Gaunt

No.1 Know Your Ratios

In a croquet stroke, the distance that each ball travels depends on the type of shot you play. So, in a roll they both travel about the same distance and in a stop shot the croqueted ball travels much further than your ball. The relationship between the distances travelled by the two balls is called their ratio.

If C is the distance travelled by the croqueted ball and Y is the distance travelled by your ball, the ration is found by comparing C with Y.

Here are three examples to demonstrate the point.

1) A drive shot where the croqueted ball travels 6 yards and your ball travels 2 yards. $C=8$ and $Y=2$. The ratio is thus 8 to 2. This figure can be simplified by dividing everything by 2. This gives a ratio of 4 to 1, which is the same but easier to use because you can now say, "For every yard (or foot or metre) that my ball travels the croqueted ball will travel 4".

2) A roll shot where both balls travel 6 yards. $C=6$ and $Y=6$. The ratio is 6 divided by 6, dividing everything by 6 gives

a ratio of 1 to 1. "For every yard (or foot or metre) that my ball travels, the croqueted will travel 1 also". This is of course what you want from a roll shot!

3) A stop shot where the croqueted ball travels 4 yards and your ball travels 1.5 feet. $C=4$ and $Y=0.5$. In this case, to make $Y=1$ we multiply everything by 2. the ratio is thus 8 to 1.

So far, so good. All we have done so far though, is to produce a set of figures. How can they help you play better?

There are many occasions where you have just made a roquet, say on red, perhaps from this you are faced with croquet shot to reach another ball. The temptation is often to just do a take-off shot, leaving the red ball uselessly behind.

Look at the situation. Can you put red somewhere useful? If you cannot do so directly can you do so by going to your target ball via another?

Consider 1) You have just roqueted a ball in corner 4, there is a ball at your hoop (4). A good croquet stroke will give you a three-ball break.

Consider 2) You have just roqueted a ball in corner 2, there is a ball at your hoop (3-back) and a ball at hoop 2. A good croquet stroke will give you a 4-ball break.

In both cases I say "a good croquet stroke". But what sort of stroke?

This is where the ratios come in. In the first consideration you need to send the croqueted ball to hoop 5 while getting your ball to the pioneer at 4. A look at the lawn shows that the distance to 5 is about twice the distance to 4. A look at the table shows that a half roll is indicated.

In consideration 2, the distance to 4-back is about 4 times that to the ball at hoop 2 (which you would like to rush to the middle of your 4-ball break). The table indicates a drive stroke.

So a good knowledge of ratios can and should help you to decide which stroke is best for the occasion. Of course you have to be able to play the stroke! If you cannot do so, then off to the lawn with you for some practice!

The table is listed in order of likely accuracy, the most accurate at the top.

Exercise: Try the strokes in the table

over different distances and see if your ratios are similar. They need not be exactly the same, but they should be consistent.

Table of ratios

Type of stroke	Approx Ratio
Drive	4 to 1
Full Roll	1 to 1
Half Roll	2 to 1
Stop Shot	8 to 1
Pass Roll	0.75 to 1

It is not important that your ratios match those given by Don, as the weight of your mallet, the style of swing, the length of your mallet you use as well as other factors will affect the ratios. What is important is that you know what your own are, and then you can practice those shots and select your line of play more quickly. In time this will become second nature and you will select shots without thinking about it. Ed.

The second item is from Keith Aiton, and was originally in Issue 184, March 1986.

Break Building for Middle Bisquers

By Keith Aiton

Introduction

The main part of this article is intended to demonstrate the basic method by which would go about picking up a break without the aid of bisques. This is in no way original thinking on my part, as it is the method used by most A-class players.

You may think that picking up a beak 'from nothing' is beyond your capabilities and that therefore there is no point reading any further. Do so anyway, and then try it and see. Above all, don't be afraid to fail, because it is only by trying something difficult that you find out the limits of your current capabilities. In any event I have included some advice on the 4-ball break, which is applicable with or without bisques. Also, I would recommend the practice routines to anyone of whatever standard.

Practice Routines

A: Place a ball 6" in front of a hoop. Run the hoop to a point 6" on the other side. Run the hoop back in the other direction and keep running in opposite directions until you fail or get bored. You will learn a lot about how to run hoops with control from this exercise.

B: Now combine exercise A with approaching the hoop. Thus, play a croquet shot approach, run the hoop with control, make a return roquet, approach the hoop in the reverse direction with a croquet stroke, run the hoop, and so on. This exercise should be easier, but try to concentrate on the final positions of both balls in the approach shot as though you are trying to obtain a rush in a particular direction after running the hoop. Vary the types of approach shot – rolls, stop shots, with varying angles of split. Vary the direction in which the rush is to be taken – forwards, backwards and to either side.

C: Now put exercises A and B together and try to make a 2-ball break from hoop 1 to hoop 5 to hoop 4 to hoop 5 to hoop 1. Keep trying this four hoop sequence until you can return to hoop 1 under the same degree of control as you left it.

Picking up a break

You are playing red and have just hit yellow, which was in a standard tice position on the West boundary. Blue and Black are joined up on the East boundary near hoop 4. Red is for hoop 1. Assume yellow has not been cut rush helpfully into court. Begin by taking off to black and blue. Do NOT try to split yellow all the way to hoop 2 with this shot, since it is far more important for red to be sent accurately near black and blue.

Check to see whether either black or blue will not rush to hoop 1 because hoop 4 is in the way. Assume that blue will rush to hoop 1. Roquet black and then stop shot black into the court obtaining a rush on blue. Rush blue just to the south side of hoop 1 (this is not easy) and approach hoop 1, sending blue into a position from which it can be rushed back towards black. After running hoop 1 rush blue off the east boundary as near to black as possible and then stop shot blue back into the court obtaining a rush on black towards yellow. Rush black off the west boundary as close to yellow as possible and stop shot black back into the court obtaining a rush on yellow to hoop 2. After hoop 2 rush yellow back to black; black to blue; blue to hoop 3. Black should now be in a pioneer position at hoop 4 and thus a 3-ball break, soon to

be a 4-ball break, has been established.

This method of break building is not difficult to master provided you can rush reasonably accurately – remember that the rushes should all be 'short' in the sense that the gap between the striker's ball and the roqueted ball is relatively small – and you can approach and run hoops with control – hence the need to practice these two skills in particular.

The 4-ball break

How often have you heard someone say "Just as I had done all the hard work"? this is usually said by someone who has broken down after picking up a break 'from nothing' and shows that the cause of the breakdown has been complacency or lack of concentration. This complacency is easy to understand because we are all told, from our earliest days in the game, that the easiest way to make hoops is on the 4-ball break. Hence there is a natural tendency to relax once a break has been established. The truth is that the 4-ball break IS the easiest way to make hoops, but the fundamental principle of croquet still has to be followed.

Play every shot with the intention of making the subsequent shots as easy as possible.

So, keep thinking about the position of the pivot ball. Try to rush the pivot ball towards the pioneer and then stop shot it to the desired position, since this manoeuvre is easier than taking off from the pivot to the pioneer. Be aware of the possibility of using the pivot as a second pioneer if you have sent out a bad pioneer initially.

I would like to give just two examples of where the normal sequence of shots in a 4-ball break can be changed with advantages.

1) After making hoop 5 send a pioneer to 2-back, rather than 1-back, and then send the pivot as a pioneer to 1-back. The advantage of this is that the pioneer for 2-back is sent out from much nearer the hoop than if it was sent after making hoop 6, hence it should be easier to place it more accurately.

2) Along similar lines to 1) above, the pioneer for hoop 6 can be sent out after running hoop 3, with the pivot being used as a pioneer for hoop 5.

Above all I think you will gain most by frequent use of the practice routines outlined at the beginning of the article.

The next piece first appeared in Issue 244, July 1996 and was written by Colin Irwin, entitled 'Winning, not losing'. The basis for the piece is cutting down on errors, to improve your play, a kind of common

sense approach to play, and can be applied to any level of play in principle. This is part One of the two piece article, Part Two of which will follow in the next issue.

Winning, Not Losing

By Colin Irwin

Over the years there have been many articles in the Croquet Gazette offering advice on practicing, playing breaks, using bisques and so on. It is all about improving your stroke play and consistency and using your bisques to construct breaks, thus playing better than your opponent and winning. This is great, I have no argument with it. In the longer term this is the only way you will improve your game. There is no substitute for practice if you want to be a better player. But this is a longer term strategy and there are a lot of players I have seen out there who could win more games immediately if they thought a bit more about not throwing the game away.

So what does this mean? Simply this. How many games have you won because you dug out the break with a couple of brilliant shots, went round, made a solid leave and finished in the next turn when the shot was missed? How many have you lost because your opponent did it? Not many I suspect. On the other hand, how often have you seen a player make a lot of hoops after the opponent dug the balls out, only to put down the break and leave an easy innings? Mostly games are won and lost on errors, and if you make fewer errors than your opponent you will win.

Which leads me back to practising. Practising to get better is good, everyone should do it. But more importantly, your practice should tell you what you can do and what you can't do, and improve the consistency of the things you can do. If anything this aspect is more important than learning new shots. As a personal example, I have never been able to do controlled pass rolls, at least not without faulting. I have given up trying to learn how, I just accept they are a low percentage shot for me to try, so I modify the way I play to do without them. Now, imagine a player who can only approach hoops with take-offs or little drives, who can't do split and stop shot approaches, so never gets control at hoops. Also this player can only play one longer croquet shot, a fairly straight full-roll, no further than 9 or 10 yards. No big splits, long drives, stop shots, half rolls etc, only this straightish short roll. He is a passable rusher, he can take a

dolly rush and hit it fairly accurately up to 10 yards or so. But all in all he is pretty awful. What can he do to make a break?

A normal 4-ball break won't work, he can't play drives or half-rolls to lay up the pioneers whilst going to the pivot. He can't get forward rushes or do big split rolls or splits, so he can't play a 3-ball break. But he can roll 10 yards and he can rush 10 yards, so what if he has two pivots? He makes a hoop, roquets the escape ball gently, rolls to the middle, uses one of the two waiting pivots to get a dolly-rush on the other, and leaving two pivots behind, rushes to the next hoop, makes it from a take-off or whatever (he doesn't need a rush remember), taps in, rolls back to the middle and so on. All he needs for the break are short rolls, rushes and simple drive or take-off hoop approaches, no real hoop approaches are needed.

Obviously this is an extreme example, but it illustrates two points, (i) it is usually possible to devise a strategy for playing breaks that suits your abilities and (ii) with two balls close together and a half decent rush you can recover from most things, so for example, if you put up a bad pioneer, if possible give it a friend. Indeed, if the croquet shot needed to put up a good pioneer is difficult, deliberately having two short pioneers but retaining control of the striker's ball may be the safest way to keep the break going. You have to balance the chance of messing up the difficult shot that gives a good pioneer against the chance of messing up the dolly rush to the hoop from the two short pioneers.

So for example, after making hoop 4 you had a longish return roquet which you had to strike firmly and now you are taking croquet near to the pioneer for five. The pivot is a yard or two beyond the peg. Is it

better to try the three-quarter roll putting a pioneer to 6, going to the pivot and taking off back to five, or just to stop shot the croqueted ball down somewhere towards the pivot, concentrating on control at 5, and accepting that you will have to make a dolly rush to 6 from three or four yards? Are you sure you won't put the pioneer beyond 6 on the roll, or that your ball won't hit the peg or be wired by it? If the pioneer is short will it be much better than where the pivot is now? Will your line for the take-off to five be unobstructed? And so on. Remember with control at 5 you can leave a controlled backward or sideways rush after the hoop to leave room for drive putting a good pioneer to 1-back. Without control at 5 you may have to leave a short 1-back pioneer, which will be a lot harder to sort out than a short 6 pioneer, where everything is in front of the hoop. I would choose control at 5.

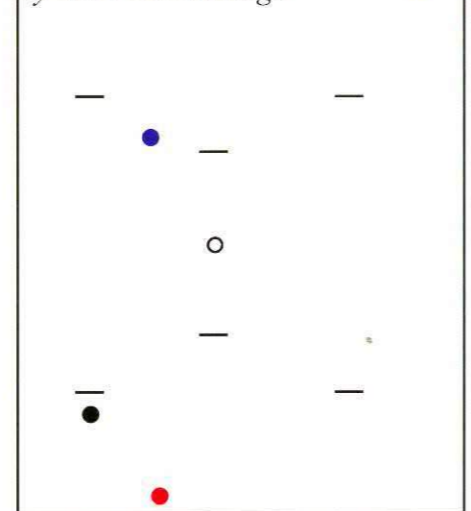
Another example. You have made 5 and are taking croquet, but the pivot is rather close and the pioneer for 6 is behind the hoop. Why try for a 1-back pioneer now? Pay the croqueted ball to somewhere a few yards south west of 6, but concentrating on a rush on the pivot to beyond the pioneer at six, almost anywhere beyond will do. Now you can get solid control at 6, probably with a reasonable pioneer at 1-back, but at worst with this pioneer halfway between the deep pivot you just played and 1-back, easy to send a pioneer to 2-back after 6 going past the pivot, so that hitting the pivot moves it closer to the loose pioneer for a dolly rush to 1-back (a couple of feet north and west of it is perfect to give a little drive to the middle and the dolly rush to 1-back). These are the things you have to constantly think about, eliminating the small errors. Small errors are cumulative, and if you really analyse the course of events leading to the

situation where a big shot is needed to prevent loss of the break or innings you will find that the position is usually the sum of a number of small, avoidable careless errors.

Finally we have a problem set by John McCullough from Issue 188, March 1987. This is from a series titled 'Break Builder', which was essentially to encourage the use of bisques to build breaks.

Break Builder 2

By John McCullough



Yellow is on the north yardline 3ft west of corner 3.

We assume that you wish to play with red, which is for hoop 1. You are prepared to set up a break using one bisque. What sequence of shots should you play to set up the break?

The solution will appear in the next issue.

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