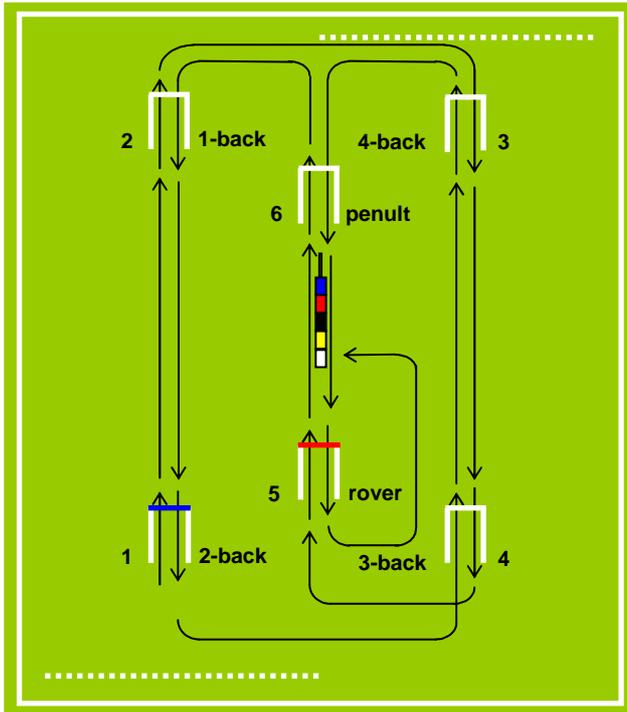


CROQUET EXPLAINED for spectators and beginners

The objective

A full-size croquet court measures 35 x 28 yards and has six hoops and the peg set out as illustrated. In a singles game each player uses a mallet to hit two balls through 12 hoops in the order shown. The hoops are only 1/32nd, 1/16th or 1/8th of an inch wider than the balls. Six hoops numbered 1-6 are 'run' clockwise and six anti-clockwise, known as 1-back, 2-back, 3-back, 4-back, 'penult' and 'rover'. The balls are then hit against the peg ('pegging out'). The winner is the first player to 'peg out' both balls for a total of 26 points (1 point each for 12 hoops + 1 for peg = 13, for each of 2 balls = 26).



The Red and Yellow balls are played against Blue and Black, but you may also see Pink and White played against Green and Brown. This allows two games to be played on the same lawn.

The start

The toss of a coin determines choice of colours and who starts first. All four balls must be used in the first four turns, starting from either of two lines at the ends of the court, as indicated with dotted lines above.

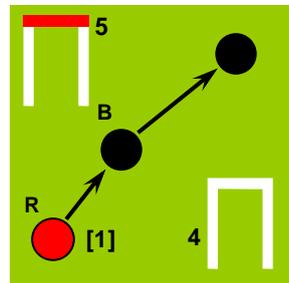
The basics and 'making a break'

Players take turns and can play either ball. Imagine you are playing with Red and Yellow and it is your turn. Firstly you decide which ball to play your turn with according to which gives you the best chances for the least risk.

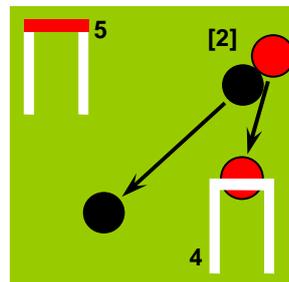
You decide to play Red. Three things can happen:

1. If Red does not hit another ball or run a hoop your turn ends and your opponent then has a turn.
2. Red runs its next hoop and you get another stroke ('a continuation stroke').
3. If Red hits ('roquets') one of the other balls you get two extra strokes. The first of these is the croquet stroke. You pick up Red, place it in contact with the ball it hit and play it again so that both balls move. You then get a continuation stroke which you can use to roquet another ball, or, if you are in position, run the next hoop and earn another continuation stroke.

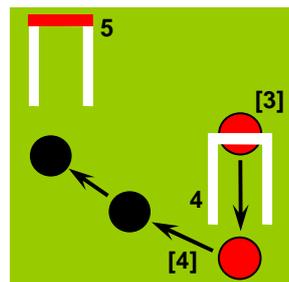
In any turn you can roquet each of the other three balls once between running one hoop and the next. With the croquet strokes and another continuation stroke this gives you up to seven strokes before you have to run a hoop or your turn ends. You aim to use one of the croquet strokes to put your ball in front of its next hoop and use the continuation stroke to run the hoop. This is shown below:



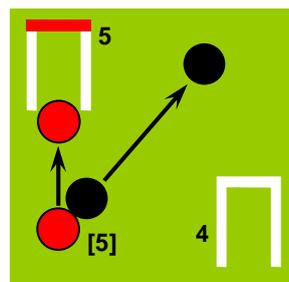
It is Red's turn and Red's next hoop is hoop 4. Red is played [1] to hit (roquet) Black. Black ends in the position shown and Red is picked up and placed in contact with Black for the croquet stroke.



In the croquet stroke [2] Red is played with the two balls in contact. Both Red and Black move – Red ending up in front of hoop 4 and Black to the side. After the croquet stroke Red then has a continuation stroke.



In the continuation stroke [3] Red runs hoop 4. As a result of running the hoop Red gains another continuation stroke. This stroke [4] is used to roquet Black again, as Red has run a hoop since the previous roquet.



Red is placed against Black for the croquet stroke [5], played to leave Black to one side of hoop 5 and Red in front. Red now has a continuation stroke (not shown) to run hoop 5 and could then roquet Black again.

If Blue (or Yellow) happens to be near Red's next hoop (hoop 6), Red may be able to use the croquet shot from Black to get close enough to roquet Blue and then run at least one more hoop in this turn, thus 'making a break'.

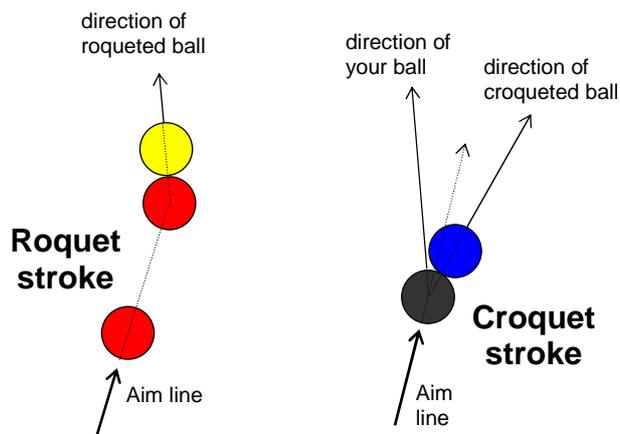
A skilled player will use all the balls to create a 'four-ball break' in which roquet and croquet strokes are used to put the balls in the middle of the court and near the next one or two hoops to be run, to use rather like stepping stones, so that several hoops (perhaps all 12) can be run in one turn.

As in snooker, a player who cannot make a break will try to leave the balls in a defensive position, where the opponent cannot make a break, but where the first player has another chance in his/her next turn should the opponent miss. This makes the game highly tactical. 'Field Snooker' is a good analogy for it.

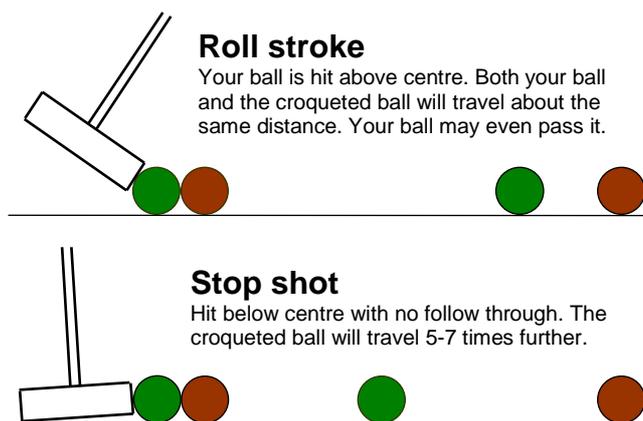
Continued

Some important techniques

As the next two diagrams show, the **roquet stroke** can be used to hit the roqueted ball at a desired angle and the **croquet stroke**, with two balls, can be aimed to send both balls in desired directions:



A normal croquet stroke played along a straight line through the centre of both balls will send the front ball 3-4 times as far as the back ball. However this can also be varied to send the balls different relative distances using a **roll stroke** or **stop shot**:



And some important technicalities

There are special laws concerning a variety of matters such as errors and illegal shots (faults), balls hidden behind hoops or the peg (known as 'wired'), groups of touching balls etc. In a tournament you may see a referee called to adjudicate. Other important technicalities include:

Time limits

A time limit, often 3 hours, may be agreed at the start. If the limit is reached, the turn in progress and the opponent's next turn are completed and the player with most points wins.

The boundary line

Balls that go off court are put back one yard into the court. So are balls that end up less than a yard inside the boundary (except a ball that has a continuation stroke). If either ball goes off from a croquet stroke, the turn ends. A ball is off court if it overlaps the boundary line.

Peeling

If you are playing a turn with one ball you can score points for another ball by the first ball hitting the other ball through its next hoop (known as 'peeling').

Pegging out

A pegged-out ball is removed from the game. In the handicap version of the game (see below), a player may not peg either of his/her balls out until both balls have run rover (the last hoop). If both players have run a ball through rover, a player may use the 'rover ball' to peg out the opponent's 'rover ball' and force the opponent to play with one ball, which is usually a disadvantage. This can give rise to some clever tactics near the end of the game.

Keeping score

Players keep score with clips, coloured to match the balls. These mark the hoop that the ball has to go through next. For hoops 1 to 6 clips are placed on the top; for the second 6 they are placed on the side. Once a player has run a hoop he/she will remove the clip for that ball. At the end of the turn the clip is placed on the next hoop for that ball.

Different versions of the game

Doubles play

In doubles play the players work as a pair, each player being allocated one ball for the match. Thus if the Red and Yellow pair decide to play a turn with Red, that dictates which of the pair plays the whole turn.

Handicap play

Players have handicaps which can range from minus 3 (best) to 24. In handicap play the higher handicapped player is entitled to a number of extra turns, called bisques, equal to the difference in handicap of the two players. Bisques are counted by sticks stuck in the ground near the court. At the end of a turn a player with bisques may start another turn with the same ball and a stick is removed.

Advanced play

In advanced play, used in championship events, players meet on level terms without bisques. Advanced play also has a few different rules. The main difference is that after a turn in which a player runs hoop 1-back or 4-back, his opponent may move one of his balls to either start line for his next turn for a better chance of starting a new break. To counter this to some extent, top experts try to use their second ball to peel the first through its last three (or even six) hoops and finish the game with a double peg out all in the same turn, known as a 'triple (or sextuple) peel'.

Association Croquet is the game summarized in this note and played at tournaments and championships, to either handicap or advanced rules.

Short Croquet is Association Croquet played on a half size lawn. Players run hoops 1 to 6 and then hit the peg.

Golf Croquet is a popular game of single ball strokes for each ball in turn, with no roquet or croquet shots.

Joining a club

There are nearly 200 English clubs affiliated to the Croquet Association with 3,500 members. Details are on the Croquet Association website, www.croquet.org.uk.

For information about the Watford (Cassiobury) Croquet Club, speak to one of the players at the club, visit the club website www.watfordcroquet.org.uk, or contact the club secretary at janet_lewis100@btinternet.com.