

Golf Croquet Tactics

(a) priorities

- it's all about scoring hoops – everything else is manoeuvre
- if you try for a hoop and miss, then you give the momentum to oppo
- if no other ball can run the hoop, you have a “free” shot – an option is to use a soft “dribble shot” to stay close to the hoop if you miss
- practice so you can rely on running hoops (or jawsing them)
- clearing etc is necessary, but should always be aimed at getting the next shot at the hoop

(b) position, position, position

- around 2/3 of your shots in a game will be to position
- practice accordingly - everyone likes jump shots or running very long hoops, but they are not your “bread & butter” shot. Practice all shots, but do a lot of practice on position – from corner 4, from the penalty areas to each hoop, from one hoop to another, short blocking shots....

(c) maintain pressure on the hoop

- you can't score a hoop unless you are in front of it
- “short is better than long” when approaching hoops from in front
- if you don't trust your clearing, just “join the mix” & see what happens

(d) “inside” = good, “outside” = bad

- you should place your incoming ball where it can't be hit far away (ie towards a near boundary, not out into the court)
- try and find the “50/50 distance” where your oppo can't decide whether to clear you or block. Depends on each oppo, and changes during games

(e) use the furniture

- hide from your oppo behind hoops and other balls so they can't hit you
- when hitting them away, try & put them where they can't see you

(f) be patient

- play to your percentages (and practice to improve them) so don't try miracle shots unless you have to
- it is often better to just load another ball in front of the hoop rather than try a difficult clearance/block trying to ensure that your other ball can run the hoop straight away
- play to win the game, not just the next hoop

(g) play your own game, not theirs

- its easy to start playing your oppo's game, but they'll usually be better at that than you, so play to your own strengths
- keep alert and adjust to what is happening – if they're having a bad day, missing hoops/clearances/jumps then you can take more liberties

(h) what to hit next?

- if you can't run the hoop, and the next ball to play after you can, block or clear it
- if neither you, or the next ball to play after you, can run the hoop then hit away their last ball in (it won't come back immediately and gives you numerical advantage at the hoop)
- remember "decoy" balls are to distract you from your correct target
- "sucker" balls are to entice you to clear them, badly. The ideal sucker ball is close enough that you will shoot at them, but far enough away that you split off into the distance – the sucker ball then comes back before you do.....

(i) jawsing

- a hoop is a hoop, but jawsing the ball gives you a chance at 2 hoops in a row
- jawsing with oppo in jumping position or behind the hoop is dangerous, but you need to weigh up their chances of clearing you – and you are likely to then still be in front of the hoop, but they won't be...
- jawsing is easier from an angle, rather than from directly in front
- be aware that jawsing often backfires, so you're accepting a deliberate risk

(j) jumping

- don't rely on jumping, since they can fail – jumps aren't your first option if you can clear instead
- practice your jumps, since you will need them – remember that you can jump a blocking ball to clear oppo, not just run hoops (but practice this as well!)
- jumping is particularly effective on even numbered hoops, since oppo is left in the jaws & not able to play laterally across to the next hoop
- only jump on even numbered hoops if you are confident that you won't pump oppo through & give them first ball to the next hoop
- conversely it is worth having a go on odd numbered hoops, since oppo already has first crack at the next hoop = "no jeopardy". It is surprising how often a failed jump, which puts oppo through, still leaves them w/o a shot to next hoop

(k) "1-2"

- If oppo has put in a good first ball, it is tempting to try clearing with both of your balls in case you miss. However a solid tactic is "first ball in, second ball clears". The first ball keeps the oppo under pressure if you fail to clear them with your second ball – if they then try for the hoop & fail, you are waiting; so often they opt to clear you, and you can get back into the hoop. If you have both balls off in the far distance after misses, this won't happen...
- this is particularly true if you have a "triangle", where the oppo ball that will play after your next shot is out of play, so first goes in & your partner ball clears. This is better than trying to run a hoop with your first ball unless dead certain....

(l) don't be surprised by the unexpected

- you can't rely on it, but it is surprising how often even the best players stuff up
- never give up, and don't be surprised when it actually happens – take care and then make the most of the opportunity

(m) styming

- hitting away gives oppo an opportunity for a miracle shot, no matter how far
- a good stymy removes any chance
- remember that a stymy that blocks clearing your other ball, and/or running the hoop, may still allow oppo to get their ball on-side at the next hoop
- stymies on indifferent lawns usually lead to heartbreak
- practice stymies (improve your percentage)

(n) promoting your partner ball

- not my first choice – usually too inaccurate to justify leaving your other ball behind out of play, but sometimes forced on you because striker's ball is blocked by partner ball from anywhere useful, but be very conservative
- can be devastatingly effective if your balls are close enough to be very accurate in where you send your partner ball (practice to improve your %!)
- beginners often want to hit their partner ball through when it is jawed in an odd numbered hoop. This will score the hoop, but it is unlikely to get close enough to the next hoop to be better than waiting and letting the partner ball itself run this hoop down to the next hoop– the exception is if oppo is about to clear the jawed ball and you can't stop oppo's ball doing so

(o) running hoops backward

- not my first choice – looks easy but all too often you end up jammed against the back of a hoop, or only half way through (ie not live), or you run it so well that you haven't blocked oppo...
- there are however times when oppo is ready to run the hoop with their ball next, and you have no other option
- sometimes running a hoop hard backward may be better than just rolling through (eg if they can jump you if you just roll through the hoop & block, but you can clear them with a decent shot)

(p) "back door" play

- deliberately putting a ball behind the hoop is counter-intuitive (see a & c above) but oppo will tend to discount such a ball, and not hit it away, so it can be a useful tactic to influence play at a hoop if you haven't a better option
- especially useful to discourage oppo from just jawing their ball (eg if they're setting up a promotion shot to H13 after H12)
- also useful to block an already jawed oppo ball, so it can't just head for the next (even numbered hoop). Remember that jawed balls can still jump you.
- it is usually better to be a yard back than close in – you have less dead zone (where you can't hit oppo)

(q) playing to the side

- if your partner ball is off in the distance, and oppo is close but can't run the hoop, then play to 2-3 yards (depending on your clearing distance) to the other side of the hoop, "Inside" – towards a near boundary – is best.
- this won't get you a chance to run the hoop, but gives you time to get your other ball back in play. If instead, you head for the boundary out in front of the hoop, oppo will just put in a block and see if you hit them through
- if you get into an impasse with 2 balls hiding from each other on either side of a hoop (waiting for someone to crack & go in front), don't get too close to the hoop – it is easy to then pop out far enough to give oppo a shot at you, and it constricts your shooting options

(r) do more than one thing if you can

- if you can, try and achieve more than one thing each turn
eg don't just hit them away – try and stop your ball where it can run the hoop, or block the return shot on your partner ball
- conversely, try and give oppo more than one thing to do – if they are not in front of a hoop, and you put your ball the correct distance in front of, but back from, the hoop, they will be undecided about whether to clear you or block. This depends on your oppo's skill, and even how they're playing at the moment, but your goal is to see them ambivalent about which to do – you can often see them physically dithering, and they will usually then do neither well

(s) "in-offs"

- deliberately hitting a ball on the side, so that your ball goes through the hoop (or clears the other oppo ball)
- really great if they come off, but - if you miss - your ball will usually then be behind the hoop, and momentum will change back to oppo
- if you are close enough, go for it – makes for a bit of excitement!
- practice them (improve your %!) & try them in games where it doesn't matter

(t) "bombards"

- deliberately hitting a second ball into a third (& even a fourth?)
- should be easy, but – unless they're close together – it is surprisingly hard to get the angles right. Pace is also crucial – balls lose momentum when they hit each other.
- really great if they come off, but - if you miss – you hand momentum to oppo
- practice them (improve your %!). Try them in games where it doesn't matter

(u) "jump clearance"

- an alternative to bombards, when blocked from a ball you need to clear
- once you can jump, jump clearances surprisingly easy, so practice them (improve your %!). Try them in games where it doesn't matter

(v) "wicking"

- deliberately glancing off an oppo ball to get somewhere & be on-side (eg to the next hoop, before the current hoop is run)

(w) “glancing”

- deliberately hitting your partner ball through the hoop, while sending the striker’s ball on to the next hoop – the latter is on-side, because it gets there on the turn the hoop was run
- useful when partner is jawed in an even numbered hoop (since they will not be first to the next hoop when they run the hoop)
- requires setting up, and an alert opponent will not allow you to do so unless they have both balls out of position, and you are in control at the hoop

(x) AC shots

- You can’t arrange to have balls touching, or to re-arrange those that are, but occasionally you find that you can play an AC croquet shot. Main points are:
 - a) the front ball will go in the direction of the line of centres (you can’t control what direction it goes);
 - b) the back ball will go in a line twice the angle that you hit into the balls (this goes better if you practice it until you get the hang of it); and
 - c) you can control how far the balls go, by doing a roll shot, a drive or a stop shot. Again practice, but remember this is not going to happen often!

(y) “dark side” play

- never deliberately hit your partner ball out of turn, in order to create a wrong partner ball sequence that you can “discover” at an opportune moment – this is cheating, and won’t end well
- if oppo goes to the wrong hoop, some players follow with their next ball, to encourage oppo to put their other ball there as well. They then hit their own second ball to the correct hoop. Tricky play, and no real benefit since sending your first ball to the correct hoop gets you the same advantage...
- you are not required to point out your ball is offside – it is up to oppo to notice. The referee is not to point it out either, although they can rule if asked (or intervene if a player is being misled). If I have just put their ball through a hoop, so that they are next to play, I probably won’t point out my offside ball - if they hit their ball, they’ve lost the opportunity re offside. Ditto re them running a hoop, and then taking an extra stroke – the extra stroke will lose them the right to send you to the penalty area
- remember that unsporting play, or deliberate bad play/faults, can & is likely to be penalised by the referee under Rule 16 (Behaviour).

Please send comments or suggestions to improve the above to:

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