

Association Croquet - A Synopsis of the Rules

The lawn and its equipment

A full-sized lawn measures 35 by 28 yards, and is laid out with six hoops and a centre peg. Each ball must pass through each hoop twice, once in each direction, as shown in the diagram.

Championship hoops are made of 5/8" diameter metal forming a 12" high hoop with a straight top. The gap between the uprights is approximately 3-3/4" (1/8" wider than the balls), but this clearance may be reduced for top-level events. Hoops are typically painted white, with the first hoop having a blue top and the last hoop (rover) having a red top.

Championship balls are 3-5/8" diameter, coloured Blue, Black, Red and Yellow and weigh 16oz (454g).

Clips coloured to match the balls indicate which hoop each ball must score next. Clips are placed on the top of the hoop if the ball is for Hoops 1 to 6, or on the hoop upright for the second circuit.

The Object of the Game

Blue and Black play as a partnership against Red and Yellow. In singles, players play either ball of their side; in doubles, each player plays with just one ball throughout the game.

The first side to get both of their balls through the 12 hoops in order and hit the peg is the winner. Once a ball has completed the circuit and hit the peg ("pegged out"), it is removed from the game.

Play alternates between the two sides. Once all four balls have been played on to the lawn, each side has the option of playing either ball, but may not switch to the other ball mid-turn.

A turn consists of a single stroke, but the player earns another stroke for scoring the next hoop, and earns another two strokes for hitting one of the other three balls.

Earning extra strokes

The striker's ball scores a hoop ("runs" a hoop) by entering the hoop from the correct side and going far enough through so that no part of the ball is still sticking out on the side of the hoop it entered by. This may occur in one or more turns. On running the hoop the striker gets an extra shot (a "continuation stroke").

If the striker's ball causes another ball to run its hoop, that other ball is said to be "peeled" through the hoop. The hoop is scored, but no extra strokes are earned for the striker.

If the striker's ball hits ("roquets") another ball the striker gets two extra strokes. The first extra stroke is called a "croquet stroke" and is played by picking up the striker's ball and placing it in contact with the other ball, the "roqueted" ball. In the croquet stroke, both balls must move.

Following the croquet stroke the striker has one last extra stroke with their own ball. If no other hoops are scored, or balls hit, the turn ends.

Each turn, the striker may roquet and croquet each of the other three balls once only, unless the next hoop is scored. Then, each of the other balls becomes available again, and more extra strokes may be earned. In the next turn, all balls are again available to hit.

Extra strokes cannot be saved up and used later. If, for example, a player scores a hoop and immediately hits a ball on the far side, the hoop is scored, but the next shot is a croquet stroke; the opportunity for the continuation stroke from the hoop has been lost. The striker does not have the option not to take a croquet stroke if another ball is roqueted.

If the croqueted ball is sent off the lawn during the croquet stroke, the striker's turn ends. The same is true for the striker's ball, unless it roquets one of the other two remaining balls, or runs a hoop.

If any ball goes off the lawn, it is replaced one yard in from where it crossed the boundary (usually measured with the mallet, which is typically about a yard long). Similarly, any ball which stops

within a yard of the boundary is replaced on the nearest spot one yard in (usually measured with the mallet, which is typically about a yard long). The exception is the striker's ball, which only needs to be replaced on the yard line at the end of the turn.

The Start of the Game

The game starts with the toss of a coin. The winner of the toss decides either (a) whether to play first or second, or (b) which pair of balls (Blue/Black or Red/Yellow) they will play with. The other side gets the choice of the remaining option.

Whoever plays first puts one of their balls on the lawn. This shot is played from anywhere on either baulk line - a yard in from the boundary from the corner to the middle of the shorter boundary. The other side plays one of their balls on to the lawn, and the third and fourth balls are played similarly. As soon as a ball is in play it can immediately score points and make roquets. After the fourth turn, players can choose which of their balls to play in each turn.

Miscellaneous Rules

Wiring

Players are not allowed to leave their opponent with no available shot at any of the balls. Specifically, a ball may not be placed so that it's blocked by any hoop or the peg from all three other balls. A ball which is blocked in this way is said to be "wired".

The remedy for being wired is that the player may pick up ("lift") their ball, and start their turn by playing it from either of the baulk lines.

In general, a wiring lift may be awarded if:

- it's the start of your turn
- the opponent put your ball in its position
- a hoop or the peg is stopping you from getting a clear shot at all of the other balls

The detail of this rule is explained in the full Laws of Association Croquet.

Errors

Errors occur when something has happened outside the rules. Typically, the balls are replaced where they were immediately before the mistake. The turn may or may not end, depending on the severity of the case. Again, the full laws cover these in much more detail.

- Ball moves between strokes (e.g. someone trips over it, or forgets to put it back after cleaning it) - the ball is replaced, and play resumes with no penalty. If the next stroke is played without anyone noticing, the error is ignored.
- Player goes through the wrong hoop - no penalty, as they're entitled to do this, but it won't earn any extra shots, and the turn will end. If no one notices, and the player continues with the correct hoop sequence, the sequence of shots is eventually considered valid.
- Taking croquet from a wrong ball (e.g. Red hits Blue, picks up Red, places it in contact with Yellow, and croquets Yellow) - a minor error: if it's noticed, there's either a replay, or the balls are switched back. Play continues without further penalty.
- Taking croquet when you shouldn't / failing to take croquet when you should - minor errors: if no one notices, play continues without penalty.
- Playing the wrong ball - switching from one ball to another mid-turn, or starting the turn by playing someone else's ball - a major error. As soon as it's noticed, the turn ends. All balls are replaced immediately before the error, and all subsequent play becomes invalid (including hoops scored).

Faults

Faults occur when a bad shot is played. In all cases, the turn ends immediately. The opponent has the choice of playing from where the balls lie, or having everything replaced to the positions before the fault. See the full laws for details.

When striking a ball the striker must not:

- touch the head of the mallet with his hand, or slide the mallet along his foot or leg to guide it;
- rest the shaft of the mallet or a hand or arm on the ground;

- rest the shaft of the mallet or a hand or arm against any part of his legs or feet;
- fail to move the striker's ball;
- kick, hit, drop or throw the mallet, in order to hit the ball;
- use the wrong part of the mallet (i.e. not the end-face), either deliberately, or when obstructed by a hoop;
- play a push shot;
- hit the striker's ball more than once;
- hit the striker's ball so that it's simultaneously sandwiched between a hoop (or peg) and the mallet - a "crush" shot;
- move a ball by hitting a hoop or the peg with the mallet or with any part of his body or clothes;
- touch any other ball with the mallet;
- touch any ball with any part of his body or clothes;
- fail to move or shake a croqueted ball;
- damage the lawn with the mallet.

Variations to the Rules

Handicap Play

Players are awarded a handicap, which entitles the weaker player to a number of extra turns, depending on the difference between their handicaps.

These extra turns, or "bisques", may be played at the end of the weaker player's normal turn, either singly, or one after the other. Bisques are complete new turns, allowing the player to roquet all the other balls, and score hoops. Half bisques are restricted extra turns, in which a player may roquet the other balls, but may not score any hoop for any ball.

Handicap play carries with it one other restriction, in that no ball may peg out until either (a) an opponent ball has been pegged out, or (b) its partner ball has scored its last hoop.

Advanced Play

Advanced play is conducted on level terms, without bisques. Experienced players may often score several hoops at one visit to the lawn, and can leave an opponent with a very difficult position. This format attempts to reduce the number of one-sided games.

In a nutshell, the Advanced Rules try to penalise players for scoring too many hoops in one turn, by handing the initiative to the opponent.

- Whenever a ball runs 1-back or 4-back, the opponent is entitled to start their next turn with either ball played from either baulk line (a "lift").
- If a ball runs 1-back and 4-back in the same turn, before its partner has scored 1-back, the opponent is allowed to start their next turn with either ball by immediately taking croquet from any other ball (a "contact").
- If a ball is peeled (i.e. sent) through 1-back or 4-back by another ball, there is no lift or contact.
- And any player who pegs out any ball (either his own or an opponent's) is no longer entitled to either lifts or contacts.

In practice, players will usually go through the first nine hoops, and stop at 4-back, conceding a lift. The second ball may then be played through all 12 hoops, with one further lift conceded. On that turn, they may try to peel their first ball through 4-back to remove the danger of another lift. Experts will score all 12 hoops during this turn, peel their partner ball through 4-back, penult and rover, and peg out both balls to win with a Triple Peel.

Real experts can go one step further, by scoring just six hoops with the first ball, and then completing the game with a 12 hoop, six peel break - a Sextuple Peel.