

Golf Croquet – Improve Your Game

Introduction

This guide is divided into sections. Sections 1 and 3 have been extracted from Jarrod Coutt's coaching notes. They are a descriptive guide to many of the important aspects. Section 1 deals with the skills needed. Section 3 covers many of the tactics which will help your game.

Section 2 contains exercises which can be used individually or together to improve your skills. In many instances the information in the exercises are in sections 1 & 3 but in section 3 they are more focused on practical application. Section 4 contains diagrammatic examples of aspects of tactics.

Section 1 - Skills

Improving your GC game is dependent on how you stand, how you hold the mallet, how you swing the mallet, and a wide a range of particular skills and tactics.

Fundamentals

Stance: It is really important to have a stance that is comfortable to you. If you have something that is comfortable, you are more likely to keep playing this way, and this will help build consistency. In turn, this will help enhance accuracy. However, here are some basic guidelines to follow.....

Feet position may either be staggered (one foot in front of the other) or level with each other. It is important to try and focus on pointing your feet in a straight line, rather than having them pointing in or out on an angle. The distance your feet should be apart is completely up to you. Shoulder width apart is the 'standard' position, and I would encourage you not to go any further apart than that. If you would like to bring your feet closer together, this is also fine. Doing so may help keep the mallet on track (as there is less room for it to manoeuvre), but you also increase the chances of hitting yourself in the ankles! You can also play side stance, and if this suits you and is what you are comfortable with, stick with it. However, swinging the mallet between the middle of your legs will usually give you more control over the swing. How far away should we stand from the ball? There is no exact answer, as this will depend on the length of your mallet head, the length of the shaft, how tall you are and your grip. *However, for the majority of shots, we should be far enough back that when our mallet is coming through and about to strike the ball, it is coming through flat (if we are standing too close, the mallet doesn't have time to flatten out, so it will hit down on the ball and cause it to bounce. On the other end of the scale, if we are standing too far away from the ball, our mallet will come through and be on the upswing when it makes contact which will result in 'topping' the ball.)*

Hand Position; this will depend on your grip (see below), but my advice is to hold the mallet in the way you feel most comfortable. *However, it is important that you are not squeezing the mallet and holding it too tight, or, holding it loosely enough that it will fall out of our hands if someone was to whack the top*

of it. A rough guideline is to hold the mallet with a similar strength that you pick up a coffee mug with. This means your muscles will be relaxed, and having them relaxed will help maximise the chances of being accurate.

Grips: We will cover the 3 most common ones. Choose the one that is comfortable for you. Each type of grip has advantages and disadvantages, so there is no 'one grip' that is better than the others.

Solomon Grip: For this grip, it is most common to have both hands at the top of the mallet. Your hands are both shaped as if you are picking up a bottle of water with thumbs up. This grip is fantastic for power, as you can easily generate a lot of force due to having a very limited restriction in your arm movement. The potential downfall with this grip is for very soft strokes, as it is a little bit harder to control the force of the mallet due to more movement in the swing.

Standard Grip: This is having your top hand at the top of the mallet in the 'thumbs up' position, with the bottom hand in the 'thumbs down'. People often start with their bottom hand halfway down the mallet when using this grip. This is fine to start off with, but I would encourage you to move your bottom hand up the mallet so they are very close to touching (if not touching already). The reason being is that; this means you are using both arms to create power and you will be more fluid in your swing - which again improves the accuracy. This grip had a good balance of power and control, as you have only a slightly limited movement (enables you to have power), and the bottom hand reduces the movement of the swing (which allows for good control).

Irish Grip: This is having both hands in the 'thumbs down' position. A very good grip for accuracy and control, as both of your arms are 'locked in place'. However, players often struggle to generate power while using this grip as you have a limited backswing.

Swing: The ideal swing shape is similar to that of a pendulum. We want to have a nice even backswing, and for the majority of shots, a nice even follow through. It is really important to try get the swing as 'fluid' as possible, to help create consistency and improve our chances of striking the ball in the centre as often as possible.

Now that you have decided on a stance and grip let us put some of it into practice

Your swing: *Practice this anywhere, inside, outside; all you need is a mallet and a couple of minutes.*

- Use your shoulders, not your wrists.
- Swing smoothly in a fluid motion. Do not jab. Do not push the mallet.
- Practice swinging along the court boundary.
- Small swings, slowly increasing to larger swings.

- With the larger swing concentrate on using the pendulum rather than pushing the mallet (pushing involves tightening your grip and/or tightening the muscles in one arm which, in turn, tends to twist the mallet).
- Remember to follow through.
- Use the follow through to gauge how straight you are swinging.

Hitting the Ball: *Practice all these steps until they become second nature! It takes quite a while for each shot initially but after a while it becomes habit and then each step only takes moments. If you are having trouble with any part of the process, get someone to watch you to help identify what is going wrong*

- Have a practice swing, get into the rhythm. Decide where you want the ball to go. Put in a marker e.g. a corner peg so that you have a clearly defined target.
- Start with a short distance – say 1 to 2 metres.
- Align your body by stalking the ball.
- Stalk the ball. Use any or all of:
 - (i) Walk up to the ball from 2 or 3 metres behind along the line you want to hit it.
 - (ii) For short distances place the mallet behind the ball and line it centre line of the mallet through the point you are aiming at.
 - (iii) Fix in your mind the exact point you want the ball to go to.
 - (iv) For longer distances, swing over the top of the ball, with a lot of follow through. Adjust your stance until the mallet is passing through the point you want the ball to go to.
- Particularly when it is cold or it is an important shot – are you tense? Take a couple of relaxing breaths; consciously relax your major muscles.
- Keep your eye on the back of the ball or a spot of grass at the rear of the centre of the ball.
- Keep the tightness of your grip constant during the swing. Tightening your grip will change the mallet angle slightly.
- Keep your head down. Don't look up to see to where the ball is going. Count to two before lifting your head.
- Remember to follow through.

With a smooth swing and good technique when hitting a ball, your accuracy and consistency will immediately improve. Now all you need is practice, practice and practice. The practice will be more effective if it is systematic i.e. regular, graded and recorded. Regular could mean coming 30 min early or staying 15/30 min later. Graded means starting off small and gradually increasing the difficulty. Recording means having a small notebook to record your percentage success at each task.

Practice Routines

Positional play

- Choose any area on the lawn, place markers down (e.g. bisque pegs) and then see how close you can land to the marker. Remember we are focusing on adjusting the length of our backswing to match the distance we want the ball to travel.
- Start with short distances and slowly increase the distance but only after you have at least 70% success at your chosen distance. This will make you more consistent at a particular distance and help build up a feeling of how large your pendulum swing should be for a given distance.
- A variation is to go around the hoops from one to the next but not to bother with running the hoops; this will give you more variation in length and will give you a feel for the lie of that particular lawn.
- Or, take 4 balls and keep chasing them around the lawn(s) always just trying to place the ball you are hitting close to one of the other balls. This gives you plenty of variation and accustoms you to deciding with each stroke just how large your pendulum needs to be.

Hoop Running

- Place balls within the possible hooping angle.
- Starting at 1 metre, run the hoop.
- Try balls at several different angles.
- Increase the distance away from the hoop after the success rate exceeds 70%
- Try varying distances within your consistent hooping distance.
- Try running one hoop to the next e.g. 1 > 2 or 5 > 6 as this not only tests your hoop running accuracy, but also your control/judgement.
- Assume your normal stance, then move forward about 75mm closer to the ball. Your mallet will hit the ball with face angled forward slightly, imparting top spin to the ball. This will help pull the ball through the hoop – particularly when shooting from an angle.
- If the angle is 45 degrees, or more, it may be worth considering doing a jump shot.

Clearing shots (Roquets)

- A good routine is lining 4 balls on a line facing another 4 balls 1 metre away from the line (to give you 4 x 1 metre roquets). Attempt to hit the ball opposite one at a time.
- If you hit 4/4 move the balls of the line back another 2 yards, if you hit $\frac{3}{4}$ move them back 1 yard, if you hit 2/4 repeat at the original distance.
- If you hit 2/4 again this is the end of your shooting exercise, and if you hit 1 or 0 that is also the end.

- Keep going to see how far you can get.
- If you want a challenge, pick a smaller target than a ball.

This exercise is much easier and quicker if you do it with someone else.

Combination of Positional play/Hoop running

The simplest practice routine is the exercise you would have done to be given a handicap. You count the number of shots it takes you to make 6 or 12 hoops, keep a record of your lowest score and continually see if you can beat it. If you are completing 12 hoops in 30 shots or less on a regular basis you are doing extremely well!

Jump Shots:

To achieve a successful jump shot it is necessary to drive the ball into the ground to give it the top spin needed to lift it in the air. There are several different styles possible to achieve this. Generally speaking it is best to carry out specialist strokes with as little variation from your normal stroke so that is the method described. **DO NOT PRACTICE JUMP SHOTS ON THE COURTS – USE PRACTICE HOOPS SET UP AROUND THE EDGE.**

- Move your feet forward to adjust the angle that the ball will strike the mallet (the closer we stand to the ball, the greater the angle will be and the higher it will jump, but the less distance it will travel). As you move your feet forward, you must also be aware that there is a gap between your hands and your body (often achieved by extending your arms rather than having them really bent), this gap should be roughly the same as if you are playing a normal single ball stroke). As a general guide, the ball should be just behind your toes and in the 'soles of the shoes'.
- Keep your eyes on the ball!! (I know we all want to look to see if it is a success, but if we take our eyes off the ball it will not be as accurate!).
- Follow through. There are a very small % of jump shots we don't follow through on (from extremely close), but for the majority of jumps – the follow through is what helps get the ball up in the air.
- Keep your body down – this is just an addition to 'keeping your eye on the ball' and I basically mean - try not to lift your shoulders up during the shot and 'try to make the ball jump', as this flattens out the mallet and changes the angle it strikes the ball which reduces the chances of it getting up in the air.
- If you do these things, you should not fail! Remember, it is a difficult skill to master, but practice makes perfect! Aim to get good at jump shots from 1 foot – 2 yards, anything over this distance is a very good shot and I feel you should be better at the short, simple ones rather than trying to attempt the superhero shots from a long way back or you will learn the hard way.

Helpful Hints:

- *If you find it difficult to jump – start small and see if you can get the first ‘hop’ in the ball by only moving your feet half way forward. When you have got this – try and master jumping a ball along a boundary rather than in a hoop to begin with.*
- *If you cannot see the ball – your hands are too far forward and you are standing too up right – bring your hands a little closer back towards your body, and lean slightly further forward onto your tippy toes (but not enough that you fall over!!)*
- *If you play with the Irish grip – don’t be afraid to give it a go with the Solomon grip/standard grip instead. I would tend to avoid playing it with the side style/hammer style unless you consider it your only option!*
- *If you find you don’t have enough ‘control’, try tightening your bottom hand, or moving it a little bit further down the mallet.*
- *Long range jumps – reduce the angle by just about standing with the ball in front of your feet – or; move your hands further down the mallet to give you more control.*

Stop shots

You do not have to ‘stop the mallet’ while trying to perform a ‘stop shot’. It is **HITTING THE TARGET BALL IN THE MIDDLE** that will allow your strikers ball to stop – the more central we hit it, the more energy is transferred to the target ball, hence the reason the striker’s ball stops. Remember the 3 ways we tried performing stop shots:

- Hit the ball normally. Do not try and make it stop; ensure your only focus is hitting it in the centre!
- Moving your feet a quarter of a step back, but continue to follow through in the shot. Again, your focus is to hit the ball in the middle!
- Grounding the mallet – digging the ‘heel’ (back) of the mallet into the ground as you strike the ball – this does the same thing as moving your feet further back (puts a slight tilt on the mallet) and may deliver a slightly better ratio in your stop shots as the strikers ball is caused to ‘skid’ rather than roll . Although this is an advantage, remember, it is a harder shot to play as it takes more control due to the tightening of the muscles when stopping the mallet.

Remember, any type that you try and play is good. Experiment, but play what feels comfortable to you and focus on **HITTING THE TARGET BALL IN THE MIDDLE!!!!**

Helpful Hint:

- *The further away from the target ball you are, the more important it is to try and hit it in the centre rather than playing it as a ‘stop shot’.*

Warm Ups:

A warm up is a critical part of the game – especially when you are becoming involved in games outside of club days such as interclub or other competitions. It is critical that you develop confidence throughout your warm up as this may have major implications for your game. Everyone's warm up will be different, but here are some key things you may wish to consider as you develop your own (remember you only have 5 minutes so you probably can't fit them all in, and you cannot do certain things if the manager tells you not to e.g. no hoop running!)

- Running Hoops (from short distances to give you confidence), and from different angles:
- Getting the 'feel for the lawn' by taking position between hoops.
- Some shooting – keep it close until you are feeling confident. A good idea is to start off with your balls one foot apart, hit it gently enough so that after you hit it in the middle; they will be a yard apart. Keep increasing your power until you are no longer hitting in the middle.
- Get a 'feel for your swing'
- Check how wide the hoops are (can be done quickly by placing the ball in the middle of the hoop and checking the gap as some may be different to others which may result in you taking different options during the game if you know one hoop is tighter/looser etc.
- Take position at hoop one (several times).
- Take position from the offside boundaries.
- Warm up your fingers/hands/wrists/arms through some forms of stretching.

The warm up is about giving yourself confidence and allowing you the best chance at starting off with a hiss and a roar. The list above may not cover some things you like to do, if not, that's fine! However, don't be afraid to try new things and pick what you think will work best for you.

Helpful Hints:

- *Ensure you take position at hoop 1 as the last thing in your warm up, as this is always the first thing you do in a game. Believe it or not, but it can have a big difference between winning hoop 1 and possibly the game!!*

Summary:

The ball skills needed for golf croquet are not complex but to be good at GC those skills do need to be practiced and consistently good. The information and practice above will give you a good framework to work on and if implemented will enable you to be more consistently accurate.

A large part of success is confidence and the knowledge than you can do it. Firstly, you will have confidence that you have done it in practice and can do it again, easily. Secondly, you will have a realistic view of what you can achieve when considering various alternatives.

Section 2 – Practice Routines

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Exercise 1

The fundamentals are: your stance, your swing and the technique/steps needed to get these right. If you master these your accuracy and consistency will improve enormously.

Your swing: *Practice this anywhere, inside, outside, with or without a ball. All you need is a mallet and a couple of minutes.*

- Use your shoulders, not your wrists.
- Swing smoothly in a fluid motion. Do not jab. Do not push the mallet.
- Do not hold too tightly – just firmly enough that the mallet will not twist.
- Do not tighten your grip as you swing
- Practice swinging along the court boundary or a line of some sort.
- Small swings, slowly increasing to larger swings.
- With the larger swing concentrate on using the pendulum rather than pushing the mallet (pushing involves tightening your grip and/or tightening the muscles in one arm which, in turn, tends to twist the mallet or the line of the swing).
- Remember to follow through.
- Use the follow through to gauge how straight you are swinging.

Practice this exercise often! It needs to become automatic.

Hitting the Ball: *Practice all these steps until they become second nature! It takes quite a while for each shot initially but after a while the routine becomes habit and then each step only takes moments. If you are having trouble with any part of the process, get someone to watch you to help identify what is going wrong.*

- Have a practice swing, get into the rhythm. Decide where you want the ball to go. Put in a marker e.g. a corner peg so that you have a clearly defined target.
- Start with a short distance – say 1 to 2 metres.
- Align your body by stalking the ball.
- Stalk the ball.
 - (v) Walk up to the ball from 2 or 3 metres behind along the line you want to hit it.
 - (vi) For short distances place the mallet behind the ball and line it centre line of the mallet through the point you are aiming at.
 - (vii) Fix in your mind the exact point you want the ball to go to.
 - (viii) For longer distances, swing over the top of the ball, with a lot of follow through. Adjust your stance until the mallet is passing through the point you want the ball to go to.
- Particularly when it is cold or it is an important shot – are you tense? Take a couple of relaxing breaths; consciously relax your major muscles.
- Keep your eye on the back of the ball or a spot of grass at the rear of the centre of the ball.

- Keep the tightness of your grip constant during the swing. Tightening your grip will change the mallet angle slightly.
- Keep your head down. Don't look up to see to where the ball is going. Count to two before lifting your head.
- Remember to follow through.
- When you have at least a 75% success rate at hitting the marker, increase the distance.
- Remember to use the momentum of the pendulum to achieve the extra distance.

Don't worry if you are not as accurate as you expect, we will work on that later. At this stage we are simply trying to establish a routine which covers all the essential aspects and programme your brain so that the routine becomes automatic.

Exercise 2

We now have a smooth stroke and a consistent routine when hitting the ball. The next step is to position it where we want it.

Positional play

- Choose any area on the lawn, place markers. (e.g. bisque pegs).
- Start with a short distance – 2 metres.
- See how close you can land to the marker. Try to be within 300mm of the marker
- Stay at this distance until you have at least 70% success at your chosen distance. Slowly increase the distance as this will make you more consistent at a particular distance. You will also build up a feeling of how large your pendulum swing should be for a given distance.
- Move the marker to 4 metres and aim to stop within 500mm of it.
- Progress to 6 metres and within 750mm
- 10 metres, within 1 metre.
- 15 metres
- 20 metres
- Remember we are focusing on adjusting the length of our backswing as the distance increases, rather than hitting the ball harder.

The process above, is the best one especially if you keep a record, but can get a bit boring so for a bit of variation try

- Going around the hoops from one to the next but not bothering with running the hoops. This will give you more variation in length but won't be so helpful at creating a feel of how large the swing needs to be for a particular distance. However, it will give you a feel for the lie of that particular lawn.
- Or, take 4 balls and keep chasing them around the lawn(s) always just trying to place the ball you are hitting close to one of the other balls. This gives you plenty of variation and accustoms you to deciding with each stroke just how large your pendulum needs to be.

Exercise 3

Hoop Running

- Recognise the V within which it is possible to get the ball through the hoop
- Place balls within the V.
- Use the skills we have already covered. Stalk the ball, line up your shot, keep your swing smooth, keep your eye on the ball, follow through, don't look up until at least 1 second after hitting the ball.
- When close to the hoop it is particularly important to focus on the ball because the hoop may be within your periphery vision and it is very easy to be distracted and/or to lift your eyes too soon to watch it go through the hoop.
- When aiming for the hoop, don't aim at the centre of the hoop. Pick a precise point through the other side of the hoop in the direct line that will allow the ball to go through without touching the sides.
- Starting at 1 metre, run the hoop.
- Try balls at several angles within the V and still about 1 metre away.
- Remember, when entering at an angle, it is essential that you just miss hitting the nearest upright. If it hits the nearest upright it will always deflect away from the hoop. If it hits the far upright, it has a chance of bouncing through.
- As your accuracy improves to 75%, increase the distance away from the hoop in, say, 500mm steps.
- Keep a record of your success rate so that you get a measure of how you have improved over a period of time. It also gives you confidence to know that you can consistently hoop at a particular distance.

The ball has a much increased chance of going through the hoop if it has a bit of forward spin, particularly if entering at an angle.

- Assume your normal stance, then move forward about 75mm closer to the ball. Your mallet will hit the ball with the face angled forward slightly, imparting top spin to the ball. This will help pull the ball through the hoop – particularly when shooting from an angle.

For variation try

- Varying the hoop distance within your consistent hooping distance.

Later on

- Try running one hoop to the next e.g. 1 > 2 or 5 > 6 as this not only tests your hoop running accuracy, but also your control/judgement.
- If you have mastered the jump shot and the angle is 45 degrees, or more, it may be worth considering doing a jump shot. Practice this one off the playing lawn!

Exercise 4

We can now get our own hoops but we need to stop our opponent from hooping. Either by clearing their ball away (roqueting) or by impeding them from getting a clear shot at the hoop or a clean hit on the ball (blocking).

Clearing shots (Roquets)

We simply need to practice hitting another ball at varying distances. Remember all the fundamentals! Repeat them to yourself. Stage 1 of your practice is just to hit the other ball.

- A good routine is to line 4 balls on the boundary facing another 4 balls 1 metre away (to give you 4 x 1 m roquets). Attempt to hit the ball opposite one at a time.
- If you hit 4/4 move the balls of the line back another 2 m, if you hit $\frac{3}{4}$ move them back 1 m, if you hit 2/4 repeat at the original distance.
- If you hit 2/4 again this is the end of your shooting exercise, and if you hit 1 or 0 that is also the end.
- Keep going to see how far you can get. Don't worry if you have trouble at 2 or 3 metres. Concentrate on the fundamentals and the shorter distances. Slowly increase. After a few months you should be hitting the other ball consistently at 6 m and often at 10 m.
- As the distances become longer, and you are hitting the ball harder, really concentrate on the smoothness of your stroke.
- If you are consistently having trouble at distances of less than 5 metres, ask an experienced person to watch your stroke carefully to see if they can identify why.
- If you want a challenge, pick a smaller target than a ball.

This exercise is much easier and quicker if you do it with someone else.

Stage 2 of the practice is to have both your ball and the struck ball where you want them to end up

- Direction: The direction will depend on the point of the contact between the two balls.
- If they hit dead centre, your ball will impart most of its energy to the front ball and will stop quickly whilst sending the front ball much further in a straight line (a stop or stun shot).
- The further from the centre the point of impact takes place, the greater the angle the balls will take and the further the striker's ball will go.
- Do the exercises in stage 1 with the aim of hitting the ball dead centre. Keep the distances shorter and the step increases small. It takes longer to build up the accuracy needed to hit the centre point so don't be discouraged.
- If your ball does not hit centrally, take note of where it did hit and the final angle and relative distances between the balls. Sometimes you want to glance off the other ball and want one of the balls in a particular position.

Exercise 5

Blocking

Blocking in front

- ✓ Set up a ball in front of the hoop, say 1 m away.
- ✓ Practice from 2 metres away, trying to get your ball to stop directly between the other ball and the hoop.
- ✓ Experiment from different positions so that you are coming from different angles e.g. at right angles to the line between the ball and the hoop (against the block line). Then at a small angle from that line (along the block line). If we can, we want to take position 'along the block line' to have the best possible chance of landing on it. Remember, the stronger players (and anyone who can jump), will jump over top of a blocked ball – the way to counter this is to 'cuddle' up nice and close, so they are unable to get over top of the blocking ball.
- ✓ Keep practicing until you get a feel of how far away you can make a block for different angles. This will help you decide whether to block or clear.
- ✓ Note how much easier it is to block along the block line so try to make your block closer to the opposition ball where the angle is normally smaller. Firstly it is easier to achieve a block and secondly it is harder for your opposition to use your ball to "in off".

Blocking behind

- Practice placing your ball close behind the opposition ball. Close enough to impede their swing.
- Also close enough so that they have to be very careful to avoid a double tap if they decide to clear your ball.
- Place the opposition ball almost in the hoop and see how close you can get. But not touching.

Exercise 6

Stop shots

You do not have to 'stop the mallet' while trying to perform a 'stop shot'. It is **HITTING THE TARGET BALL IN THE CENTRE** that will allow your strikers ball to stop – the more central we hit it, the more energy is transferred to the target ball, hence the reason the strikers ball will stop.

- Hit the ball normally. Do not try and make it stop; ensure your only focus is hitting it in the centre!
- Practice at with the balls 500mm apart.
- Firstly softly then progressively harder.
- Note how far each ball goes depending on the power used.
- Move the balls further apart. Try again.
- Keep increasing the distance until you are not hitting the front ball in the centre.
- Record the result as a benchmark for your next practice session.

If you have difficulty, try the same exercise using either of the other following methods

- Assume your normal stance Move your feet a quarter of a step back, but continue to follow through in the shot. Again, your focus is to hit the ball in the centre!
- Grounding the mallet – digging the 'heel' (back) of the ballet into the ground as you strike the ball – this does the same thing as moving your feet further back (puts a slight tilt on the mallet) and may deliver a slightly better ratio in your stop shots as the strikers ball is caused to 'skid' rather than roll . Although this is an advantage, remember, it is a harder shot to play as it takes more control due to the tightening of the muscles when stopping the mallet.

Remember, whichever type that you try and play is good. Experiment, but play what feels comfortable to you and focus on **HITTING THE TARGET BALL IN THE CENTRE!!!!**

Helpful Hint:

The further away from the target ball you are, the more important it is to try and hit it in the centre rather than playing it as a 'stop shot'.

Exercise 7

Jump Shots:

To achieve a successful jump shot it is necessary to drive the ball into the ground to give it the top spin needed to lift it in the air. There are several different styles possible to achieve this. Generally speaking it is best to carry out specialist strokes with as little variation from your normal stroke so that is the method described. **DO NOT PRACTICE JUMP SHOTS ON THE COURTS – USE PRACTICE HOOPS SET UP AROUND THE EDGE.**

- Take your normal stance then move your feet forward to adjust the angle that the mallet will strike the ball.
- The closer you stand to the ball, the greater the angle will be and the higher the ball will jump, but the less distance it will travel. As a general guide, the ball should be just behind your toes and in the 'soles of the shoes'.
- Keep your eyes on the ball!!
- Follow through. Unless you are extremely close, the follow through is what helps get the ball up in the air.
- Keep your body down – this is just an addition to 'keeping your eye on the ball' - try not to lift your shoulders up during the shot to 'try to make the ball jump'. It is hard to resist!
- Now just practice making the ball jump over another ball.
- Experiment with the distance between the balls.
- Find the closest distance you can jump successfully.
- Try longer distances but don't try over 2 metres – it is too difficult.
- When you can consistently jump the front ball, move to a hoop and try both jumping and getting it through the hoop. By now you will be able to get the ball to jump without too much effort and you will need to focus on all the techniques needed for hooping.

Exercise 8

Faults

The aim of this exercise is to be able to recognise when there is a possibility of a fault occurring and practicing those shots so that a fault does not occur. Fourteen striking faults are listed under Rule 13 (a), but the ones that are applicable for this exercise are:

1. Striking the ball with any part of the mallet other than an end-face
2. "Double taps" the striker's ball by hitting the striker's ball more than once in the same stroke.
3. "Crushes". The ball, the mallet and the hoop are all in contact at the same time
4. Maintains contact with the striker's ball by pushing or pulling the ball with the mallet.

It is difficult to identify whether a fault occurs if working by yourself. Having someone else watch will make it much easier to ascertain whether a fault occurred. It will also be excellent practice for the watcher.

Striking the ball with any part of the mallet other than an end-face normally occurs when the opponent's ball is very close to your own and you want to hit your ball away from theirs.

- ✓ Place two balls 50mm apart on the open lawn. Try hitting one directly away from the other.
- ✓ If successful progressively move the balls closer together until you cannot hit it away with the end-face i.e. it is the edge of the mallet that hits the ball.
- ✓ Now move the balls so that the one you want to hit is within 100mm of the hoop. Space them close but at a distance that you were not 'edge hitting'.
- ✓ Try hitting directly away again.

Continue with variations until you know what you can achieve safely. *Note: take care also that contact between the mallet and the ball is not maintained,*

Maintains contact: This happens most often when you are hitting down on the ball in an impeded shot.

- ✓ Repeat the example close to the hoop given above.
- ✓ Place the ball within 400mm of the hoop and try to hit the ball away back through your legs "a hammer shot".
- ✓ In each case try to do a clean shot and try again to do a faulty shot. The aim is to be able to recognise the difference.

Never slide the mallet down or across the ball. It will almost always be maintained contact. Also, beware when doing jump shots. If you are hitting the ball too hard into the ground there is a possibility of maintained contact.

Double tap: The best way to judge whether a double tap has occurred is to note how far the striker's ball has gone. Double taps normally occur when hitting straight into the other ball. If it is a clean shot the striker's ball will stop quickly, if it is not, the second tap will make the ball go appreciably further.

- ✓ Place two balls 100mm apart. Hit the rear one directly into the centre of the other.
- ✓ Firstly, softly with no follow through, then softly with follow through.
- ✓ Repeat with medium strength.
- ✓ Repeat with a strong stroke.
- ✓ In each case decide whether a double tap occurred.
- ✓ Now place the balls only 30 mm apart and repeat the previous exercises.
- ✓ At 30mm spacing try hitting the front ball at an angle. Experiment at different angles until you get a clean shot.

Keep trying combinations until you have a good feel for when you are able to identify the potential for, and take the steps necessary for you to avoid double tapping.

Be aware that double taps can also easily occur when close to the hoop. The ball may rebound from the upright and touch the mallet.

Crushes: Crushes can be very difficult to identify, particularly when the shot is not a soft one. They need to be watched carefully from the right position, listened to and the final direction of the ball needs to be noted. This exercise will be most useful if you have a watcher who has experience in watching for this fault.

- Place the ball against the hoop upright on the outer edge. Practice hitting the ball away from the hoop, adjusting your angle so that you **are** hitting away and not into the hoop.
- Place the ball 10mm from the outer edge of the hoop upright and try hitting the ball past the hoop as close as you can without it touching the hoop.
- Place the ball about 30 mm in front of and about 10mm to the outside of an upright. Try scoring the hoop (or at least getting it into the hoop). Try it softly; try it with different degrees of power. Never follow through. Soft clean shots will be obvious; the more powerful shots may be more difficult to judge.
- Never try sliding shots (moving the mallet face across the ball). You are most likely to either maintain contact, hit with the edge of the mallet, or damage the lawn. The probability of a referee calling your shot as a fault is too high to be worth the risk.
- Place the ball just into hoop 3 central or almost centrally aligned. Assume you are trying to get the ball through the hoop and to hoop 4 – i.e. a powerful shot. Experiment so that the ball goes through cleanly without touching the sides, then repeat with another ball but hit it slightly off-line so that it brushes the upright on the way through. Note where the balls finish up. The first will have gone straight in the line you hit it. The second will have deflected slightly. If you have hit the ball hard enough to get it well done the lawn

toward hoop 4, there must have been enough follow through for a crush to have occurred.

Important note: Faults are to be avoided. The point of this exercise is to create a realistic appreciation of when the faults are likely to happen so that you can avoid making them yourself and ask your opponent to have the shot watched if you think there is a possibility of him causing a fault.

Exercise 9

Warm Up:

A warm up is a critical part of the game – use these suggestions to develop your own routine. Remember you will have 10 minutes max.

- Run hoops (from short distances to give you confidence, and from different angles:
- Get the 'feel for the lawn' by taking position between hoops.
- Some clearing shots (roquets, rushes, stop shots) – keep the balls close until you are feeling confident. A good idea is to start off with your balls one foot apart, hit it gently enough so that after you hit it in the middle; they will be a yard apart. Keep increasing your power until you are no longer hitting in the middle.
- Get a 'feel for your swing'
- Check how wide the hoops are (can be done quickly by placing the ball in the middle of the hoop and checking the gap as some may be different to others which may result in you taking different options during the game if you know one hoop is tighter/looser etc.
- Take position at hoop one (several times).
- Take position from the offside boundaries.
- Warm up your fingers/hands/wrists/arms through some forms of stretching.

The warm up is about giving yourself confidence and allowing you the best chance at starting off with a hiss and a roar. The list above may not cover some things you like to do, if not, that's fine! However, don't be afraid to try new things and pick what you think will work best for you.

- *Ensure you take position at hoop 1 as the last thing in your warm up, as this is always the first thing you do in a game. Believe it or not, but it can have a big difference between winning hoop 1 and possibly the game!!*