

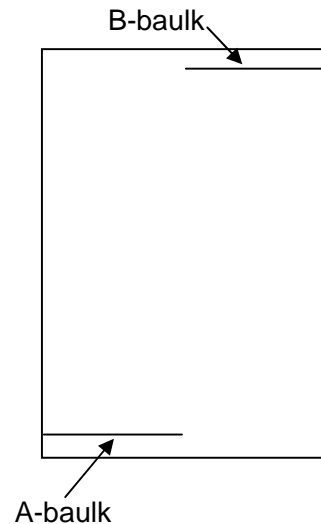
Beginner Croquet Coaching: LESSON 6:

This lesson covers:
The Standard Opening

Bisques

THE OPENING

To start the game, the players toss. The winner can elect to go first or second, and the other player can choose the colour of balls they use. The players then take turns to hit each ball onto the lawn from one of the 'baulks' which are along the yard-line (see diagram).

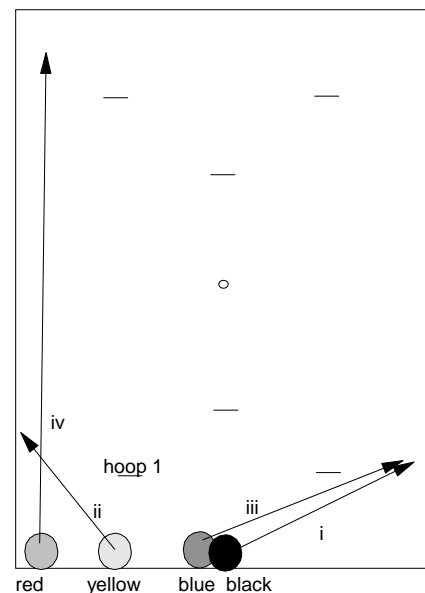


OPENINGS

It surprises beginners that croquet players do not start the game by shooting at hoop one. The hoops are very narrow and the chances of running one from 6 yards away are small. If the ball does not run the hoop and bounces off it, then the next player has a ball by their hoop which is close enough to roquet, and this will make it easy for them to run the hoop.

So, the first player tries to put the first ball where it is unlikely to be hit by the opponent; and then puts their second ball near it, so it can be roqueted easily on the next turn.

The other player puts their first ball where it is possible – but difficult – to hit it.



initial shots for the standard opening

THE STANDARD OPENING (see diagram)

In the standard opening the first player plays from the centre of the south boundary at the end of A-baulk and hits their ball off the lawn by hoop four.

The second player normally replies by playing a ball from the boundary in front of hoop one to the west boundary between hoops one and five.

The first player then tries to hit his/her own ball on the east boundary – but if it misses, the two balls will be close together, and on the next turn there will be an easy roquet.

The second player tries to hit his/her own ball on the west boundary. If they are successful, they will do a take-off towards the opponent balls, roquet one of them, and line up a rush towards hoop one with the other opponent ball.

BISQUES

Croquet has a handicapping system which makes it possible for players of different ability to compete on an equal basis. It works by giving the weaker player a number of extra turns against the stronger player. The number of extra turns that you get in a game is given by the difference in the handicaps – so if a player on handicap 8 plays one on handicap 19, the 19 handicap player gets 19 minus 8, or 11 extra turns. These extra turns are called 'bisques'.

To take an extra turn when your normal turn finishes, you catch your opponent's eye and raise a finger or call "bisque" to indicate that you are taking a bisque. White sticks called bisques are stuck into the side of the lawn to indicate the number of bisque turns remaining, and are drawn out as the bisques are used up.

You play one of these **bisque turns** immediately following one of your normal turns.

A bisque turn is just like any normal turn. You have to continue playing with the same colour ball as in the turn you have just finished. The striker's ball is brought on to the yard line if necessary and you can re-roquet all of the other balls on the lawn once again. You can play one bisque turn followed by another bisque turn until they are all used up without allowing your opponent to play, if you want.

Bisques can be used in three ways: to **repair** a mistake, to **attack** and build a break and finally, **defensively** to prevent an opponent gaining a strong position. If you have bisques available, it is often best when you are trying to roquet another ball to hit the ball gently so that it finishes near the other ball if you miss – then you can take a bisque and make the roquet easily.

Your handicap starts at 24, and is reduced as your play improves. There are four grades in croquet: handicaps 14 to 24 are 'bronze', 9 to 12 is 'silver', 5 to 8 is 'gold', and below 5 is 'platinum'.