

ONE-BALL

An entertaining and not-so-simple singles game, in which for example Black plays Red.

All normal rules of croquet apply, although from time-to-time the pattern of play may appear to resemble "hare & hounds". It is well worth shooting at the opponent whenever a fairly safe opportunity arises; also bearing in mind that there is no lift if you are not responsible for the other ball's position (e.g. "hiding" options often present themselves).

Editor's note. I am indebted to Kevin Carter for the following comprehensive guide to one-ball.

Introduction

In 'One-Ball' croquet, each player has a single ball, otherwise every law of Association croquet applies -roquets, croquets, faults, etc. (including wiring lifts, which occur with much greater frequency than in the two-ball game).

This is one reason why One-Ball is often a better introduction to the game than Golf Croquet - beginners only have one set of rules to master. The other reason is, of course, that the experience of roquets and croquets is a useful stepping-stone towards the full game.

However, One-Ball is not just for the beginner. It is also a game of skill and tactical finesse that appeals to a growing band of experienced players. Several tournaments are held in the UK each year, including an increasing number advertised in the CA fixture list. The oldest, the Winchester One-Ball, has been granted 'Championship' status).

These also illustrate two further advantages of One-Ball. Firstly, games generally last just 20-25 minutes, so it is possible to complete an entire tournament in one day. Ten rounds, though tiring, are perfectly feasible. Secondly, because there is no sitting-out, everybody keeps warm. This makes the one-ball variation an ideal winter game.

Just like the full game, tournaments may be either handicap or advanced play. The best handicapping scheme is based on one-third of the difference of regular handicaps. However, over the years it has been found that this simple scheme results in an undue bias towards 'A-class' players and so players with handicaps below 2 go onto a special scale, see below. Quadruple banking is perfectly feasible. This illustrates yet another One-Ball plus point: two-lawn clubs can hold tournaments for up to 24 people.

Skills

Ask anybody who has not played One-Ball very much and they will tell you that success depends upon good shooting and being able to run long hoops. While both of these skills are useful, just as they are in the full game, they are by no means the only keys to success. Indeed, more important than being a good shot is to be reliable over four to seven yards. Regularly running four-yard angled hoops is far less useful than running a one-yard hoop hard enough to go down to the next, 21 yards away.

The most important skill of all is to have a good range of solid croquet strokes. Rolling up to a hoop from various distances and angles, stop-shot hoop approaches and pinpoint take-offs are all valuable assets.

But hold on - croquet strokes are played in breaks. One-ball is not a game of breaks, is it? The answer is "yes". In tournaments, the contenders who make the most hoops in their breaks almost always win One-Ball games. A single break of four or five hoops, which should be well within the compass of a scratch player or of a high handicap player using some bisques, will often put a game beyond doubt.

The skills exercised in One-Ball are extremely useful in the full game. For instance, mastering the stop-shot hoop approach improves breaks, rolling up from all angles helps high-bisquers to maintain breaks without resort to too many bisques, playing two-ball breaks helps better players to 'make a break out of nothing'. So, One-Ball is also an excellent means of 'sharpening up' for the two-ball game.

The One-Baller's equivalent of a triple peel is the all round break.

The Opening

The One-Ball game opening has rather fewer options than in the full game. The player going first dare not lay-up in front of hoop one, and so lays a tice - normally a little beyond opponent's comfortable shooting range, but such that the first player would be happy to shoot if the second laid up in front on hoop one (*Figure 1*).

If the second player shoots hard at the tice and misses then the first player can lay-up in front of hoop one. If the second player ignores the tice and lays-up in front of hoop one, then opponent shoots, going off in the middle of south boundary if missing. This leaves the second player a difficult chance of a break.

Sometimes the second player will neither shoot at the tice nor lay-up for hoop one. Various other responses, such as corner one and wired by hoop one, have their merits.

Some players like to shoot at hoop one when going first. While it is spectacular and satisfying when the ball sails through, perhaps even coming to rest in front of hoop two, the dangers of clanging the hoop and leaving opponent a superb opportunity in return for only a six yard roquet (or a bisque, if applicable), are far too great to make this a winning strategy.

General Tactical Principles

Most tactical principles follow from the premise that "breaks win games".

If you are ahead, strive to be at least two or three hoops ahead. This is because an opponent only one hoop behind will have several opportunities in a game to run a hoop hard enough to come right down to where your ball is sitting.

Conversely, sitting on opponent's tail is an excellent tactic, biding time until opponent takes one more stroke to get a good hoop approach than you and then pouncing.

This implies an ability to run hoops hard. This is not a difficult skill to master, follow-through being the essential component.

This waiting tactic, in turn, creates some interesting decision points. For instance, do you chance a difficult hoop or play safe by taking another shot to get right in front of it? If your long hoop is six and opponent is sitting in front of one-back, then the answer is most likely yes, since the reward for running six will be a pot at opponent's ball and an easy chance of a break.

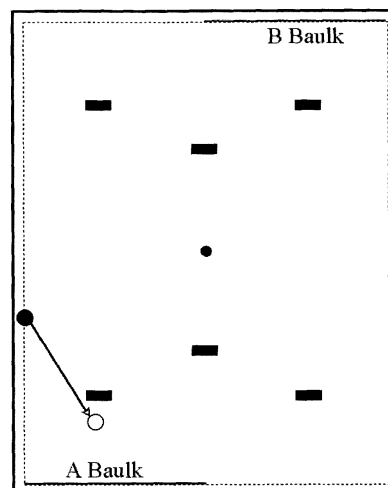


Figure 1. An opening tice covering a lay-up at hoop 1.

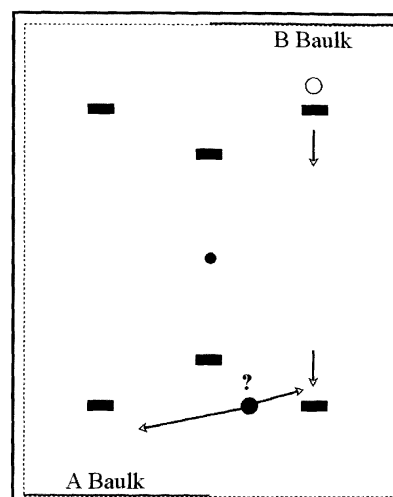


Figure 2. An example where the safe hoop is worth more than a difficult quick hoop.

If, however, your difficult hoop is three and opponent is for four but not in position then you should not go for your hoop. Instead, improve your position to be certain of running the hoop hard on the next turn (*Figure 2*). This leaves opponent the unenviable decision of putting his ball in front of hoop four waiting for you to come down to it or retreating, probably to somewhere on the south or east boundaries.

There are often opportunities to lay traps. Consider: you have just hit in near hoop one (opponent's hoop) and you are for hoop four. Not surprisingly you do not fancy the long pass roll to hoops four/five, so to where do you move opponent's ball to as you attempt to get a good position on your hoop?

The answer is to split opponent's ball up to east of hoop three. On your continuation stroke you tidy up and sit neatly in front of hoop four (*Figure 3*). You will be pleased for opponent to shoot at you, since a miss leaves the ball on the south boundary just west of where you will be after running hoop four hard - another break opportunity.

One-Ball also has some advanced tactics - advanced in the sense that they are not recommended for other than 'A-class' players. One of the most fruitful can be deliberately trying to 'get some wire'.

For instance, if you have an easy hoop three to make when opponent is in front of five (or even in front of two-back), then you will improve your chances of roqueting opponent's ball if, when you run hoop three hard, you skim the left hand upright of the hoop, deflecting the ball to the right (*Figure 4*). A further stage is to place your ball fractionally to the right when in front of three back in order to facilitate getting the left wire.

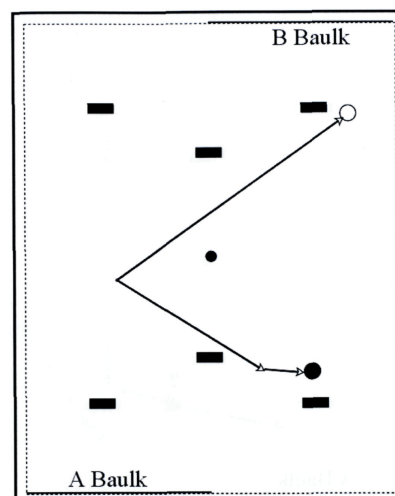


Figure 3. Laying a trap.

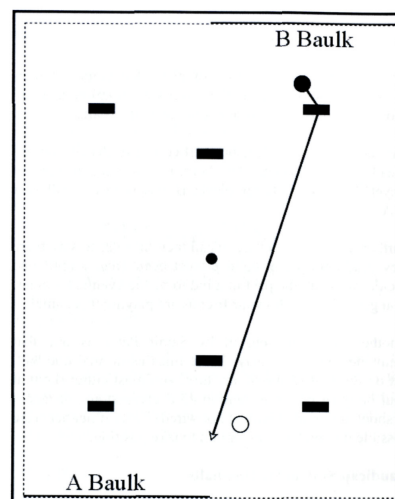


Figure 4. Getting some wire.

One-Ball Variations

Players (from three to six can play, depending on their degree of sobriety) take their turns in rotation and are allowed to roquet and croquet only one other ball.

The tactics are complex, but suffice to say that if you are ahead do not expect to stay there. For instance, to prevent player A running a hoop, player B may send C's ball near to A.

Further, if two players are ahead then in order to stay there they might form a pact to protect each other - until one decides to break the pact in a bid to be the eventual winner. You get to know who your friends are playing this game!

Another variation, sent in by Samir Patel, is one that eliminates defensive play. Same rules as normal one ball, but on the first stroke of any turn, you must either shoot at your hoop (if possible - within 45 degrees at any distance) or shoot at the other ball (if not wired). Only if neither were possible do you have the option to take position.

Handicap System for One-balls

One-ball handicaps are based on one third of the difference between the two players' handicaps (with $1/3$ and $2/3$ being rounded to $1/2$).

However, this system has been found to be biased in favour of A Class players so below handicap 2 the following changes are made.

FROM	TO
$1\frac{1}{2}$	1
1	0
$\frac{1}{2}$	-1
0	-2
$-\frac{1}{2}$	-3
-1	-4
$-1\frac{1}{2}$	-5
-2	-6
$-2\frac{1}{2}$	-7

Examples:

6 plays 0: The 0 becomes -2 giving 8 difference, then divide by 3=2.67, rounded to $2\frac{1}{2}$.

8 plays -1: The -1 becomes -4 giving 12 difference, then divide by 3=4.

2 plays -1: The -1 becomes -4 giving 6 difference, then divide by 3=2.