Simplified Main Rules of Golf Croquet

Like every game, golf croquet has rules which you need to know. In informal games such as ordinary club games they may not always be rigidly enforced, but it is better to learn and observe all rules so as not to slip into careless habits. Most players will eventually play in competitive games where the rules will be enforced. Not knowing the rules can cause you some embarrassment, and can well cost you games.

**The halfway or offside rule**
If you shoot at a ball or the hoop, miss, and end up more than halfway towards the next hoop, you are in an offside position. However if the hoop is not made before it is your turn to play that ball again you can hit it back over the halfway point into an onside position. But if the hoop is made - either by an opponent or your partner (in a doubles game) before it is your turn to play that ball again your opponent may (and usually will) ask that it be played from one of the penalty spots in its next turn.

- A ball in a position more than halfway to the next hoop is not offside until the hoop is made. (To be offside the whole of the ball must be over the halfway line).
- A ball cannot be offside if it was knocked to its position (directly or indirectly) by an opponent’s stroke, or if it came off an opponent ball.
- If you make a hoop for another ball (either your own or an opponent’s) by peeling a ball through the hoop and your ball comes to rest more than halfway to the next hoop you are not offside.
- Penalty spots - an offside ball in its next turn must be played from whichever penalty spot the opponents require, and it should be moved there immediately if there is any likelihood of it interfering with any other ball. However the opponents may choose to have it played from where it comes to rest, if they believe this is to their advantage.

You are not obliged to inform your opponent if you are offside, although in social or intraclub games almost everybody does; some will do so in competitive games but many won’t. If your ball is in an offside position and your opponent plays a ball before directing you to a penalty spot, you are not obliged to move it; the playing of the opponent ball has “condoned” the position of your ball.

**Double tap or multiple hit rule**
If your mallet hits your ball more than once in a stroke it is a fault. It most commonly occurs when you hit your ball hard at an opponent ball which is very close, attempting to knock it away.

- Even if two sounds can not be heard, if the stroke is played along the line of centres of the balls, or at a slight angle, the relative distances travelled by the striker’s ball and the ball it hit will show whether or not a double tap has occurred. If you use a hard stun shot (no follow through) and hit the opponent ball in the middle from a distance of say 3”, the opponent ball will travel many yards while your ball will travel only a few inches or perhaps a foot from the point of impact. But if your ball also travels several yards (more than say a quarter of the distance travelled by the opponent ball and along much the same line), this could only have happened if your mallet reconnected with (double tapped) your ball - either because you did follow through, or you were too close to permit a legal hard shot to be made; see next point.

- The commentary contained in the Rules publication relating to Rule 13(a)(6), states that a hard shot along the line of centres is likely to cause a double tap if the balls are less than 5cm (2”) apart even if played as a stun shot, and is likely to occur even if the balls are 15cm (6”) apart if the shot is played with follow-through.
- To avoid a double tap when the balls are close together, hit at an angle to the line of centres. The closer they are, the greater the angle needs to be.

- When hitting with a glancing blow your ball may well travel as far as or further than the other ball without a double tap having occurred. In these cases, the rule of thumb is: if the balls travel along paths at an angle clearly greater than 45° no double tap has occurred; if they separate at an angle clearly less than 45° there has almost certainly been a double tap; if the angle is pretty much exactly 45° a double tap has possibly occurred but unless two hits have been distinctly heard the striker is given the benefit of the doubt.

- A double tap cannot occur if the balls are actually touching. If you believe they are, make sure the opponent or a referee agrees.

- A double tap is one kind of striking fault. If any striking fault occurs and is noticed before an opponent has played the next shot, the opponent can choose to leave the balls where they end up or replace them where they were before the fault was committed; if a hoop has been run in the turn in which the fault occurred it does not count.

An unfortunate misconception
Some players have been misinformed by people telling them that “If the balls are less than a mallet head apart and you hit away in a straight line it will be a double tap”. This is wrong; apart from the fact that it is contrary to the commentary on Rule 13(a)(6), “a mallet head” is not a fixed length, they vary greatly. To repeat - judging whether a double tap has occurred when hitting through the line of centres is based on the relative distance travelled by the two balls, not how far apart they were when the stroke was played.

It is worth noting that even if the two balls are considerably less than 2” apart it is certainly possible to hit through the line of centres without double tapping, with a gentle, well executed stun shot which causes the striker’s ball to only travel a fraction of an inch – but of course the ball it has struck will only travel maybe six inches or so. There are scenarios where you may wish to do this but they occur very rarely – normally you want to hit an opponent ball as far away as possible.

Hitting with the edge of the mallet face
- This is also a striking fault, with consequences as above.

- The rule only applies to hampered shots - ones where your swing or backswing is hampered by another ball, a hoop or the centre peg. It is not a fault to hit a ball with the edge of the mallet face in normal, unhampered situations.

Other striking faults
There are 14 striking faults covered by Rule 13, and when and if you get to play in high level competitions you need to know them all. Initially, though, there are three that you do need to know, and preferably have them demonstrated by a coach or experienced player:

- Rule 13(a)(7) relating to the “crush” or “three in contact” fault.
- Rule 13(a)(9) requiring a ball in contact with a hoop or the peg to be hit away from it.
- Rule 13(a)(10) relating to “pushing” - maintaining contact between ball and mallet.

If this seems a bit daunting, don’t stress about it, you’ll become familiar with these rules as you play games. When playing informal games, if there is a situation where you feel you could commit a fault, do ask more experienced players for guidance. In competition doubles you are allowed to seek advice from your partner.

“Air swing” and inadvertent contact
- An “air swing” - an attempt to hit a ball but which does not connect - is not a fault. Another attempt (or even several) can be made; the mallet must strike the ball in a turn.
- There is no such thing as inadvertent contact in golf croquet; if a ball is touched with the mallet it is end of turn.
- (If you’ve played the traditional form of the game, be aware that both these rules are the exact opposite of the corresponding rules in Association croquet).

**Non-striking faults**
These are covered in Rule 12, and again when and if you start playing in high level competitions you will need to know them, but for beginners there are only two that you need to be familiar with:

Non-striking faults involving a stationary ball. By far the majority of non-striking faults are committed by the striker touching a stationary ball with mallet, foot or clothing while striking or preparing to strike his ball. His turn ends and the opponents decide whether any balls moved should be left where they are or replaced. If a hoop has been run it doesn’t count. If a player *other than the striker* touches a stationary ball that player’s side misses its next turn.

Non-striking faults involving a moving ball. If a moving ball hits a player or his mallet or clothing, that person’s side misses its next turn; the opponents can choose to leave the moving ball where it comes to rest, or where it would have come to rest had it not hit the player. So - be careful where you stand and keep your eyes on the game!

**Playing the wrong ball**
The rule is straightforward - obviously you must play only your own ball (or balls, in singles) and they must be played in the correct order. The remedy for breaching it is, confusingly, different for singles and doubles.

- **Singles**: if the striker plays the *partner ball*, and either player or the referee notices before the opponent next hits a ball, play is stopped, the balls are replaced, any hoop point scored is cancelled, and the striker resumes with the correct ball. If the opponent or referee notices that such an error is about to occur, play should be forestalled. If the striker plays an *opponent ball* in singles, the penalty and limit of claims (ie before the next ball is played) is as for playing the wrong ball in doubles.

- **Doubles**: if a player plays the wrong ball and this is noticed before another ball is played, (playing another ball “condones” the wrong ball play), then:
  - the opponent may choose to have the balls replaced or left where they are;
  - any hoop point scored is cancelled;
  - as the colour sequence has been broken, the opponents may continue with either ball;
  - neither opponents nor referee should forestall if a wrong ball is about to be played.

In practice, in informal doubles games particularly at beginner level it is common to forestall, and if a wrong ball is played the opposition may well allow the shot to be replayed with the correct ball. However, each such occasion should be used to reinforce knowledge of the rule - because it is of course enforced in most higher level games and in all competitive ones.

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