



Golf Croquet Coaching Pod on How to Use Extra Strokes

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Target Players

This pod is aimed at all competitive GC players. Some aspects of the session, such as “How to play against extra strokes” would benefit lower handicap players, whereas “Scheduling the extra strokes” would be of more benefit to high handicappers.

Its main purpose is to help players understand that the correct use of extra strokes is the easiest way for a handicap player to win games and reduce their handicap.

Sections

Calculating the number of extra strokes

Deciding when to use an extra stroke

Optimising your extra stroke

Wasting your extra stroke

Playing against extra strokes

Outline

The guiding rules for deciding whether to use an Extra Stroke are:

Will it significantly increase the chance of my winning a hoop?

Do I expect to win this hoop?

If the answer to either is no, then don't use the extra stroke.

We'll be starting off with calculating how many are awarded, then looking at specific factors to help you decide when and how to use them.

We'll then have a look at techniques to induce your opponent to use their extra strokes with minimum advantage to themselves.

Finally, we'll look at a situation when you have lots of extra strokes.

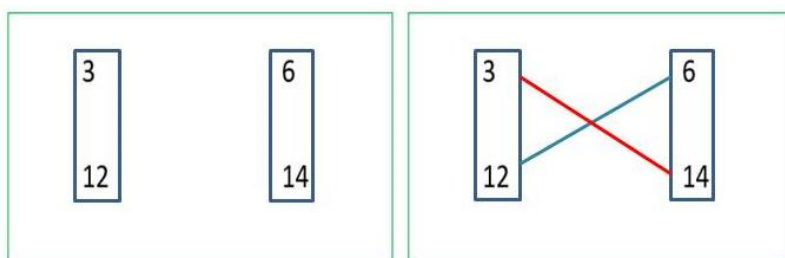
Calculating the number of extra strokes

In the standard game (13 point) the calculation of extra strokes in Singles is very simple, just the difference between the handicaps.

For games of a different length, such as 7 or 19 points, you will need to look at the relevant conversion table on the CA website.

In Doubles the calculation was changed in late 2018 in the 5th Edition of the GC Rules.

- a. Identify the player with the highest handicap.
 - i. If two players on the same side share the highest handicap then one must be declared as the 'higher' of the two.
 - ii. If two players on opposite sides share the highest handicap then either can be chosen first as it makes no difference.
- b. Calculate half of the difference between the handicaps of the highest handicapper and the lower handicapper of the opposite side.
- c. Round up, if necessary. The highest handicapper receives this number of Extra Strokes.
- d. Repeat this for other two players and award the extra strokes to the higher handicapper of the two.
- e. If two players on the same side have both benefitted from the rounding up then one of them must lose the extra stroke so gained.



This diagram shows the players' whose handicaps are compared when a (3, 12) pair play against a (6, 14) pair.

Therefore the number of players with extra strokes may be 0, 1 or 2 but never 3 or 4 and may be on the same or on opposite sides.

Exercise:

Calculate the extra strokes for each player in the following Doubles matches.

Blue 3 and Black 12 v Red 6 and Yellow 14

Answer : Black 3, Yellow 6

Blue 5 and Black 5 v Red 10 and Yellow 11

Answer : Red 3, Yellow 3

Blue 4 and Black 10 v Red 7 and Yellow 7 (Red='Low')

Answer : Black 2, Yellow 2

Blue 8 and Black 9 v Red 8 and Yellow 12

Answer : Black 1, Yellow 2

Blue 11 and Black 10 v Red 4 and Yellow 7

Answer : Blue 4, Black 1
or Blue 3, Black 2
(Black and Blue decide)

F Blue -2 and Black -1 v Red 6 and Yellow -2

Answer : Red 4, Black 1

G Blue 1 and Black -1 v Red 6 and Yellow 6 (Red='Low')

Answer : Yellow 4, Red 2
or Yellow 3, Red 3
(Red and Yellow decide)

H Blue 6 and Black -1 v Red 6 and Yellow 6, (Red = 'Low')

Answer : Yellow 4

I Blue 6 and Black 3 v Red 6 and Yellow 3

Answer : Red 2, Blue 2

Recording extra strokes

Most clubs use a system based on some sort of token, such as beads or marbles, to record how many extra strokes a player is entitled to. These are kept in a pocket and handed over to an opponent before the stroke is taken.

There are several problems with this system:

No-one can see how many are left and it is necessary to check regularly, which is distracting.

If you want to know whether an opponent still has unused extra strokes, you need to ask, which alerts them to the possibility of using one.

The tokens can be left in a pocket by mistake, causing confusion in a subsequent game.

A better alternative is to have coloured sticks at the side of the lawn; the colour signifies the player who has the extra strokes. With this system, anyone can see easily how many extra strokes remain and for which player.

Signalling an extra stroke

This is an area that can cause misunderstanding and needs to be properly understood.

The best time to signal an extra stroke is before you play your main turn and the standard expression is “I’m thinking of taking an extra stroke”. Make sure your opponent has heard you (not all GC players have 20:20 hearing).

According to the latest rules (Edition 6, 2022), you are entitled to declare that you are taking an extra stroke up until the time that an opponent takes their shot. However, it is considered unsporting to wait until they are fully prepared to play before announcing your decision.

You can change your mind and decide not to take it up to the moment when your mallet touches the ball.

However, if you are the next player you are entitled to ask whether the player is intending to take an extra stroke. If they say no, they cannot change this when you take your stance.

An additional reason why it is better to announce your intention before taking your main turn is because it shows that you are thinking ahead and you will place your ball so as to optimise the extra stroke.

If you are thinking of taking an extra stroke after committing a fault, then you may wait for the opponents to decide whether to replace the balls or leave them where they stopped, and then announce your intention.

Deciding when to use an extra stroke

A defensive extra stroke is one that stops the opponent getting an immediate hoop but does not increase your chance and may simply delay losing the hoop.

An attacking extra stroke is one that greatly increases the chance that your side will win the hoop. If you get the chance to use several early in the game to get a good lead then it is worth doing, but don't be concerned if the opponent gets some hoops as well.

A major consideration is the number of extra strokes available. This doesn't mean that you can afford to waste them, just that you can use 1 out of 8 available in a situation when you wouldn't use 1 out of 2 available. In general, a defensive extra stroke is of limited value. If you clear the opponent from in front of a hoop without setting up your own ball, or your partner's, then the opponent will simply return to the hoop-running position. At best you have given yourself a 50% chance of getting the hoop.

The exception is when the opponent is leading and you have plenty of extra strokes available. For example, if your opponent has scored 6 you should use any available extra strokes to stop the opponent getting the next hoop or they will be wasted. Also, if time is running out you should use them to ensure that the scores are at least equal when the timer goes. (It is good practice to carry your own stop-watch so that you are always aware of the time remaining.)

Attacking turns fall into four types:

- 1 A stop shot clearance that leaves you in a good hoop-running position, unthreatened by an opponent.
- 2 A clearance or block that leaves your partner ball in a good hoop-running position, unthreatened by the next opponent.
- 3 A shot to be first to the next hoop, particularly a long hoop.
- 4 A shot to get position on the next hoop in order to dominate it, including Jawsing.

In Doubles, if you win the toss and one of you has several extra strokes then they should play first with the intention of using an extra stroke straight away. The actual decision to use it must depend on the quality of the opening shot and should be based on probability.

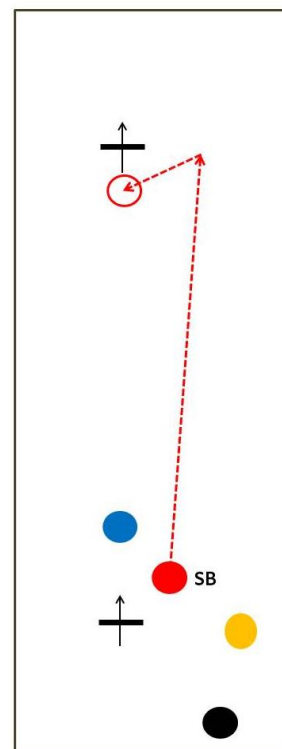
Probability of running the hoop 0%; with an extra stroke 50%.	Use 1 of 6.
Probability of running the hoop 50%; with an extra stroke 90%.	Use 1 of 6.
Probability of running the hoop 0%; with an extra stroke 90%.	Use it.
Probability of running the hoop 0%; with an extra stroke 20%.	Save it.
Probability of running the hoop 75%; with an extra stroke 90%.	Save it.

None of these are hard-and-fast rules but you should be thinking on these lines when deciding. This means that you should have a good estimate of your ability to run hoops and to get a ball to stop where you want.

Always remember that an extra stroke can go wrong ('How to waste extra strokes') or a good, or lucky, opponent can clear your ball unless it's in the jaws. (If they do clear you they will probably finish out of position.)

These probabilities apply at all hoops, not just hoop 1, but at the shorter hoops (4 to 5, 6 to 7, 10 to 11) the chances of being cleared are higher and should be considered.

Demo 1 is an example of converting a 0% chance to a 90% chance with an extra stroke.



Exercise:

Separate into groups of not more than 4.

Each play a standard opening ball from corner 4 to hoop 1 and decide (with help) whether to take an extra stroke.

Consider the probability of running the hoop from where you are.

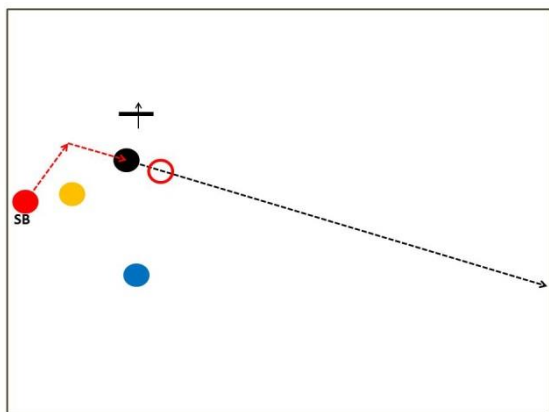
Consider the probability of running the hoop from where you want to finish your extra stroke.

Consider the probability of getting the ball to that position.

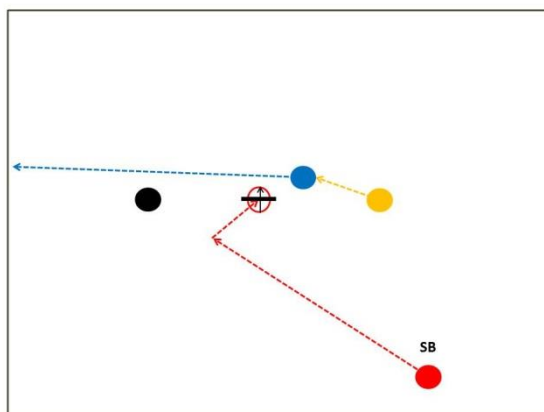
Consider the probability that an opponent will clear your ball.

Place the balls as in the diagrams for Demos 2 and 3 and decide whether an extra stroke is worthwhile, by considering what the subsequent shots will be.

Demo 2

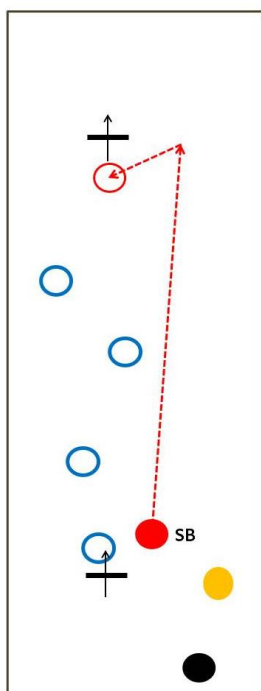


Demo 3



Change the positions of Blue and Yellow in Demo 3 and discuss how this might affect your decision.

Demo 4



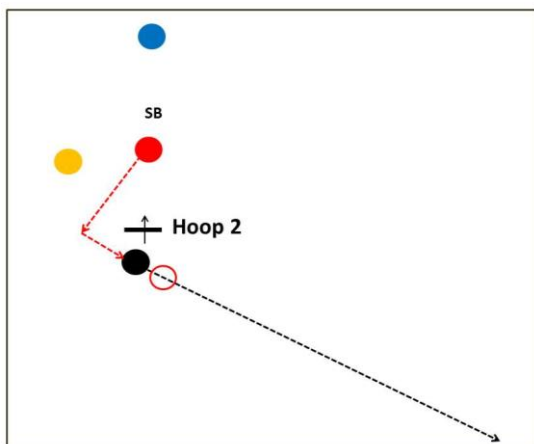
This is the same case as Demo 1 but with four alternative positions for the Blue ball that has just run the hoop.

Compare the positions to see how they might affect your decision to take the extra stroke.

Optimising your extra stroke

Having decided to take an extra stroke, it is still necessary to think carefully about how to use it to maximum advantage.

In Demo 3, if your partner ball could be cleared by the first opponent then there is no point in jawsing your ball because it will simply be removed by the second opponent. However, if you do decide to use the extra stroke then make sure your first shot gives you an angled approach as it is much easier to jaws a ball from an angle than from straight ahead.



Demo 5

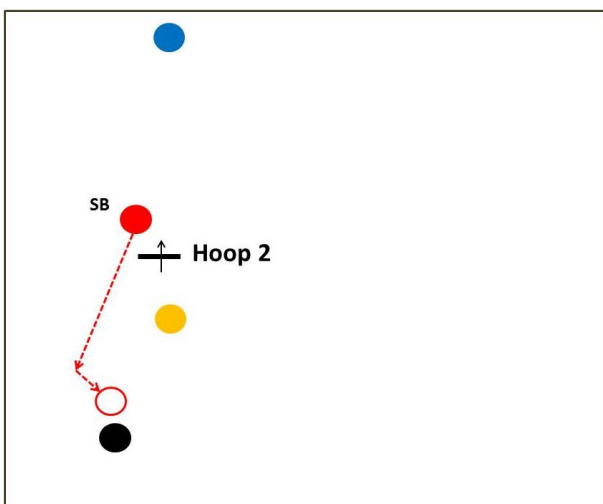
In Demo 5 you could play either side of the hoop but it's far better to hit Black into the open court.

By playing a stop-shot you can clear Black and hide Red from Blue.

You should always take account of the positions of all of the other balls.

To ensure that Blue can't interfere, you should plan to put Yellow between Blue and the hoop or, if Red doesn't finish in a good position, put Yellow in front of the hoop.

Clearing the opponent may not always be the best alternative as they may be able to hit from a distance.



Demo 6

In Demo 6, Yellow is already in position, but threatened by Black.

Red cannot clear Black with the main shot, but could use an extra stroke to do it.

Alternatively, the extra stroke could be a gentle stroke so that Red is blocking Black from Yellow. This shot is not easy to control and should be played so that Red is too close to Black for a jump shot and not on the straight line to Yellow.

Exercise:

Separate into groups of not more than 4.

Set up Demos 5 and 6 and each try playing the shots required.

Wasting your extra strokes

There are many ways to waste an extra stroke, some being in the design of the turn itself, some in the choice or quality of shot played and some because of an oversight.

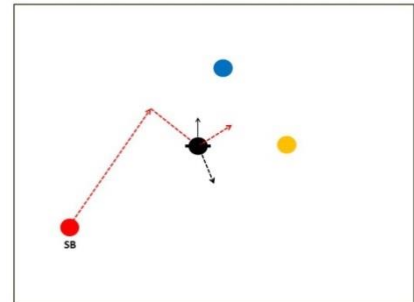
Ways of wasting an extra stroke include:

- 1 Saving an Extra Stroke for the 13th hoop and losing 5-7 as a result.
- 2 Losing a game with unused extra strokes because you lost track of the time.
- 3 Trying to improve a hoop-running position and over-running the hoop.
- 4 Putting a second ball near the hoop when your first is probably going to get it.
- 5 Running a hoop or peeling your partner through a hoop. (Points cannot be scored for your side with an extra stroke.)

6 Insufficient clearance

Knocking the opponent back through the hoop by only a small distance, so that it can probably run it anyway. If the setup shot is out of position, change your plan and don't use the extra stroke.

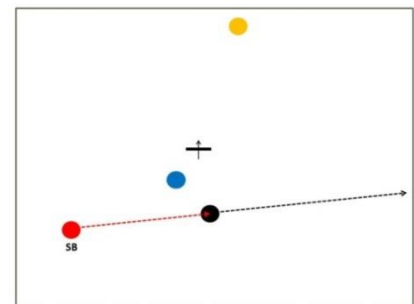
Demo 7 Insufficient clearance



7 Pointless clearance

Hitting an opponent away when their other ball is in a hoop-running position and your partner can't clear it.

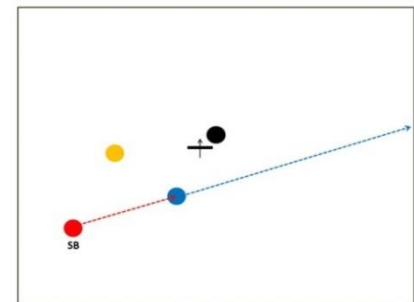
Demo 8 Pointless clearance



8 Oversight

Hitting an opponent away when there was a good chance of your partner doing it without using an extra stroke.

Demo 9 Oversight



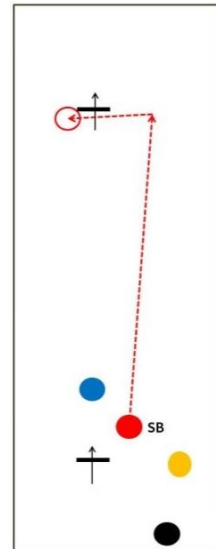
9 Poor shot

Attempting to lay up too close to a hoop and over-running the approach.

Demo 10 Laying up too close to the hoop

Another example of this is trying to get closer to a hoop and over-running it.

Exercise: In groups of 4, set up each Demo to see why the extra stroke should be played differently, or not at all.



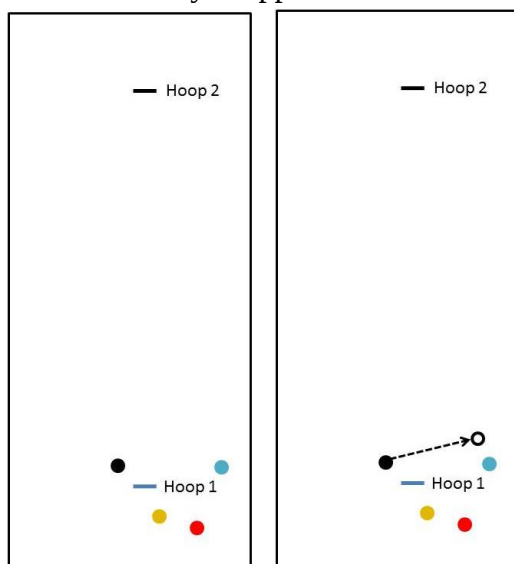
Playing against extra strokes

When playing against extra strokes you should:

- 1 Try to make your opponent use extra strokes defensively by leaving situations that cannot be ignored.
- 2 Avoid leaving situations that allow an easy attacking extra stroke.
- 3 Set up delayed approaches, using rushes, in order to counter long shots with extra strokes.
- 4 Run odd-numbered hoops hard so that you will be as close as possible if the opponent uses an extra stroke to set up on the next hoop.
- 5 Play a blocking shot that will force the opponent to use two extra strokes.

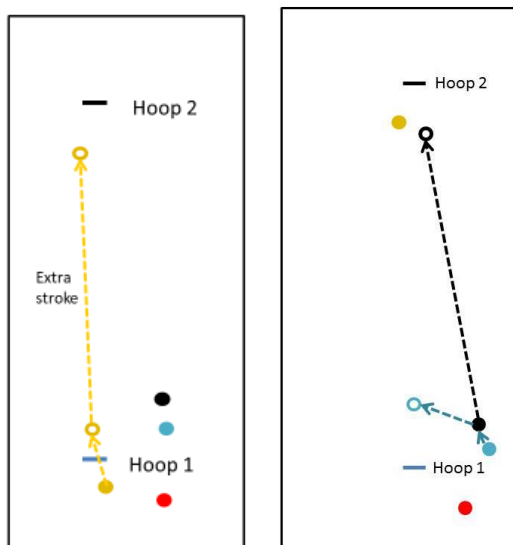
If you simply send a ball behind the hoop, to cater for your opponent jawsing the ball, they will save the extra stroke and you will be out of position. If, instead you send your ball to a position from which a hoop run is easy and a jump shot is feasible they may be tempted to take an extra stroke to jaws the ball and force you to jump. Perfecting your jump shots is therefore of primary importance.

Demo 11 Delayed approach



Place the striker ball (Black) between partner (Blue) and the next hoop.

If Yellow uses an extra stroke after running the hoop then Blue will rush Black, giving a hoop or an easy clearance at the next hoop.

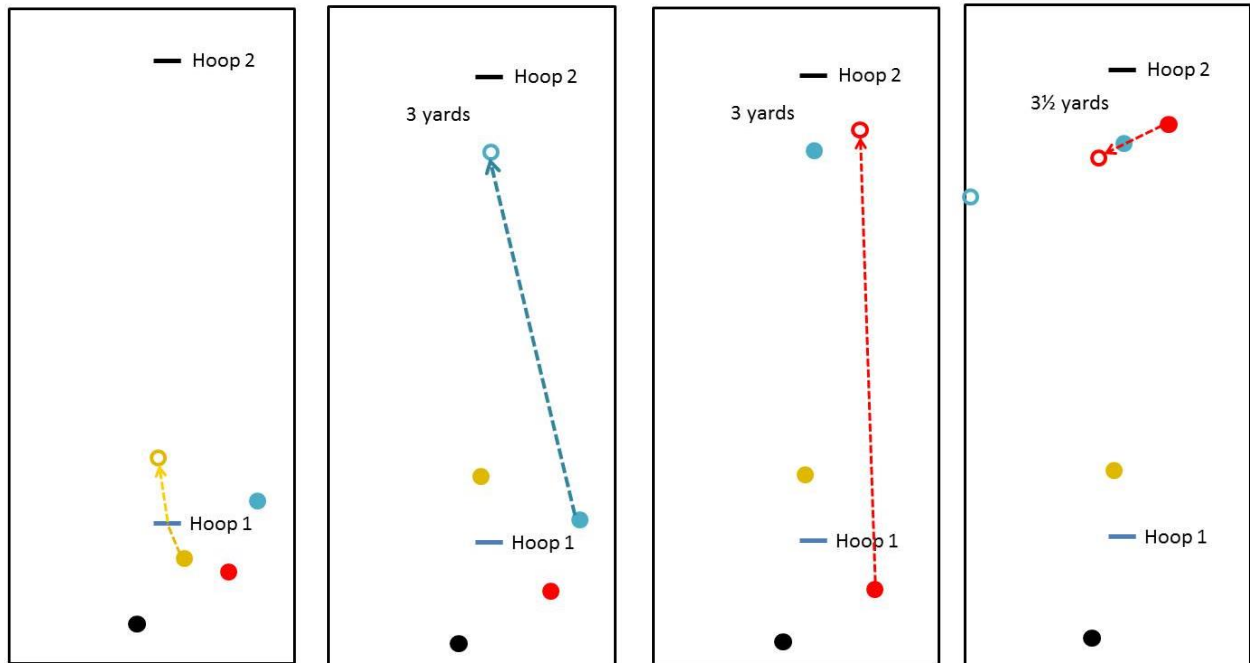


If Yellow decides not to use the extra stroke then the rush can be used to put Black there in a dominant position. (Alternatively, Blue could jump Black to go down to a more controlled position.)

If you are the first to play to the next hoop don't try to set up close to the hoop. Leave your ball at least 2-3 yards away, or even more if your hoop-running ability is good.

If the opponent then joins you and uses an extra stroke to clear your ball, they will probably have difficulty setting up an easy hoop run with the same shot.

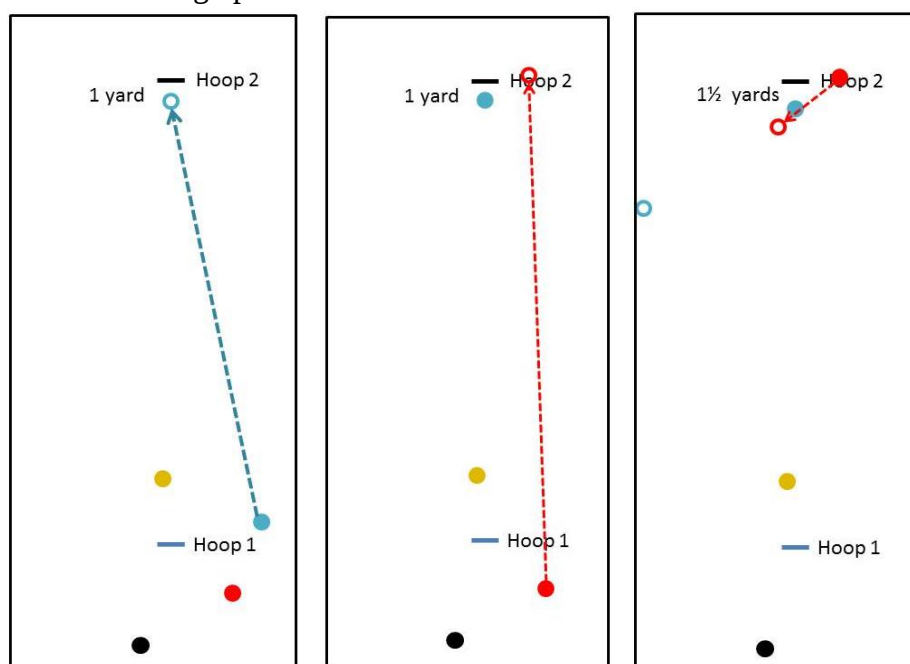
Demo 12 Setting up at a distance



Your chance of running the hoop might have been only 50% but theirs will be no better and it cost them an extra stroke to achieve.

The general advice is therefore never to put your ball close in front of a hoop where the opponent can clear it with a stop-shot and set themselves up for an easy hoop.

Demo 13 Setting up too close

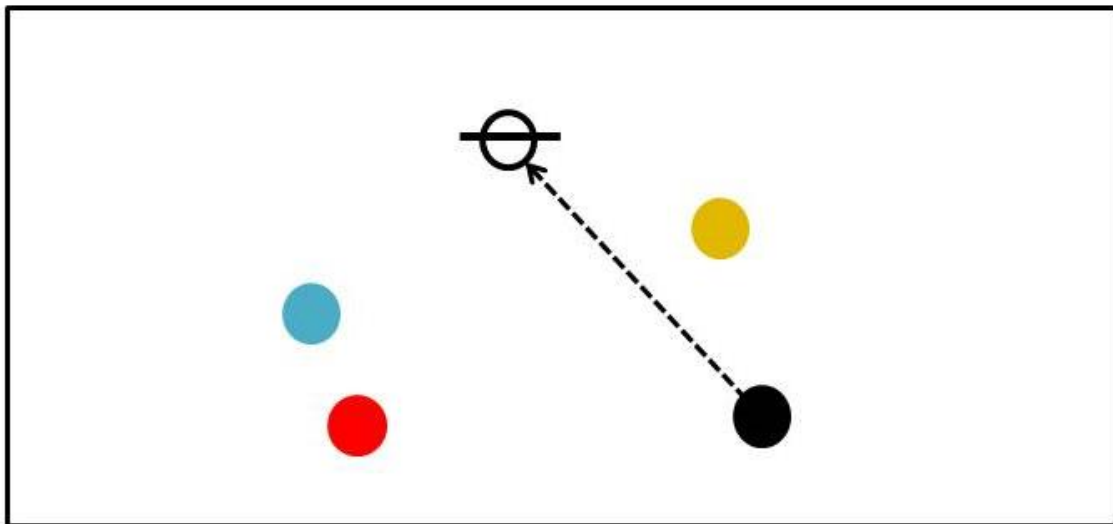


If you can run a hoop you should do so and, in general, this is best done with a hard stroke. However, if you are unsuccessful in a long hoop attempt then a hard stroke runs the danger of leaving your ball a long way from the hoop.

If the opponent does not have any balls behind the hoop (and cannot promote one there) then play a long or angled hoop run gently. It may go through but, if not, it should leave you in the jaws. An opponent who is unable to jump reliably, or is in no position to do so, will be forced to go behind the hoop and use an extra stroke to clear you away.

1. This is a defensive extra stroke as they are unlikely to be able to set up with the same shot.
2. Such a clearance is particularly necessary if your partner ball is in a position to rush you through, as in Demo 14. (At an even-numbered hoop, if Yellow does not clear Black, it may be better to set up a rush to the next hoop.)

Demo 14 Gentle hoop approach



In this situation, a hard shot by Black that failed to run the hoop or jaws would enable Yellow to clear Blue so that Red could run the hoop, with no extra stroke used. Putting Black in the jaws with Red too far away to attempt a jump shot leaves Yellow with the option of giving up the hoop or using an extra stroke to clear Black from behind.

If this happens then several consequences are possible, depending on where Yellow goes after hitting Black.

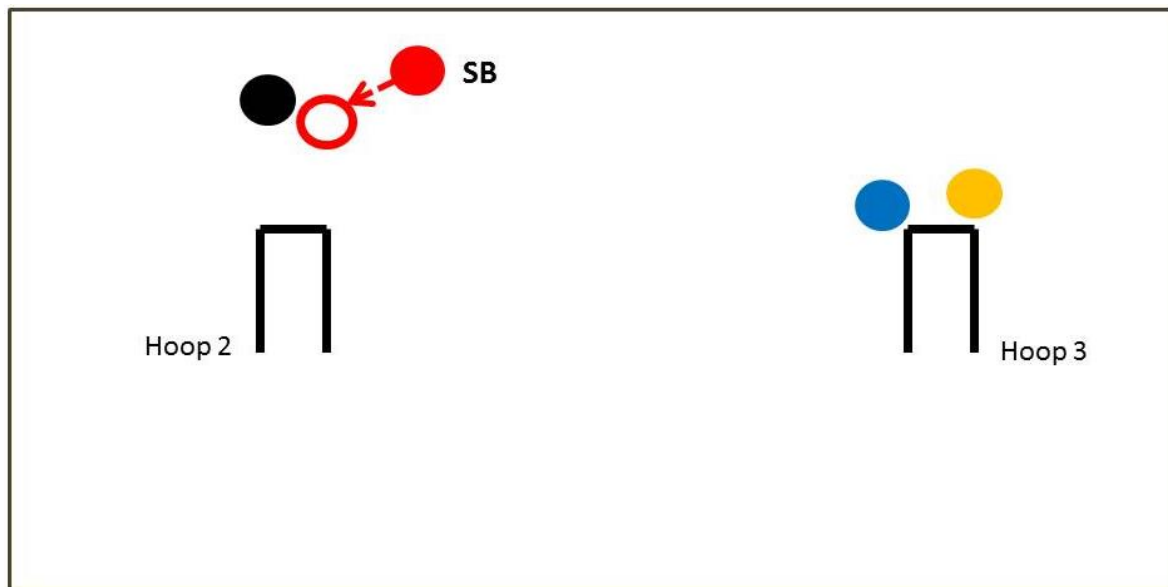
- 1 If it goes to one side then Blue can go into the jaws.
- 2 If it comes back into the jaws then Blue can clear Red and set up a jump shot.
- 3 If it comes through by a few inches then Blue can play an in-off.

If possible, delay your hoop run until you have set up a promotion to the next hoop. This is particularly relevant at even-numbered hoops.

It is also worth blocking the opponent's line to the next hoop so that they will probably need an additional extra stroke if they want to jaws the ball.

This is particularly true if you are the first to play to the next hoop after, for example, hoop 2. You put your first ball, Yellow, into a good hoop-running position and the opponent does the same with Blue. Black's plan is to use an extra stroke to remove Yellow, leaving the hoop for Blue.

Play Red across to a close block on Black so that Black's main shot will not get near Yellow. In order to remove Yellow, Black is now going to need to use two extra strokes.



Demo 15 Force opponent to use an additional extra stroke

Exercises:

In groups

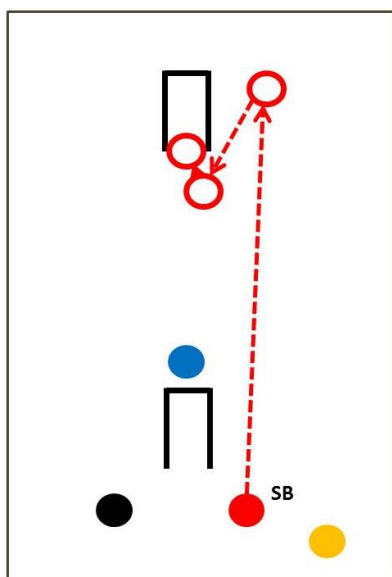
- 1 Set up Demo 11 and practise creating, and doing, a rush shot.
- 2 Set up Demo 12 / 13 and practise leaving your ball 3-4 yards short of the next long hoop.
- 3 Set up Demo 14 and, from an angle, practise sending a ball into the jaws.
- 4 Set up Demo 15 and practise placing a blocking ball close to the target ball.

Scheduling the Extra Strokes

This section deals with the situation when you have a lot of extra strokes. For example, if you are a 14-handicapper playing a 0-handicapper, then you will have 14 extra strokes.

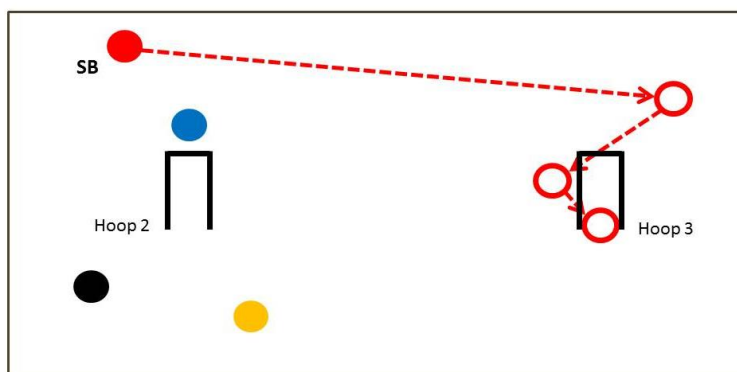
In order to win you need to get 7 hoops. If you get your 7 hoops then it doesn't matter whether your opponent has 0 hoops or 6, you still win. Your thinking should be based on calculating how many extra strokes you have **per hoop that you win**.

If you start using the extra strokes on hoops that the opponent wins then they are effectively wasted. In the case of a 14 playing a 0 then there are 2 extra strokes per hoop gained. When the opponent has run a hoop, you should immediately be thinking "I've got three strokes with my next ball to ensure the next hoop".



For example, the opponent runs hoop 1 hard with Blue and goes half-way to hoop 2. Play Red as close to hoop 2 as possible, then take an extra stroke to put it in a position to jaws it, then take a second extra stroke to put it into the jaws (being careful not to over-run).

Demo 16 Planning to use 2 extra strokes (1)



Demo 17 Planning to use 2 extra strokes (2)

You can use this policy after every hoop that your opponent runs but if your first stroke is not good enough then don't use the extra strokes, keep them for a better chance.

If you run a hoop then you can use a similar line of thinking, but you will only have two strokes to use. For example, you have run hoop 1 with Blue and reached a position clear of the back of the hoop. Take an extra stroke to put your ball as close to hoop 2 as possible then take a second extra stroke to put it as close in front of the hoop as possible, without compromising your next (hoop-run) shot.

The opponent will try to clear you from 20 yards away. If that doesn't succeed, then use your second ball to protect the one you have put into position.

Exercise: In groups of 4 try playing from hoop 1 to 2, 2 to 3 and 4 to 5. In each case, see how many strokes are needed to put your ball into a safely jawed position.

Key Points

It doesn't matter how many hoops the opponent gets, as long as you get 7.

Whenever possible, apply the basic tactical rule: "Set up with the first ball, clear with the second".

You should only use an extra stroke on a hoop that you intend to win.

Try to be the first to approach each long hoop.

Only use an extra stroke if it will significantly increase your chance (or your partner's) of running the hoop.

If you use one on a hoop and simply delay losing the hoop then the extra stroke was wasted. Therefore try to avoid using them on a contested hoop.

Use extra strokes to attack, not to defend.

Whenever possible, a clearance shot should be played from a position between the target ball and the nearest corner. This is even more relevant with extra strokes.

If you have 7 or fewer then each extra stroke should be worth a hoop.

If you only have 1 or 2 extra strokes, they should each be used to jaws a ball in an odd-numbered hoop.

If you have more than 7 extra strokes, you should plan to use more than 1 at a hoop.

If you intend to jaws the ball with a second extra stroke, play the first one to give you an angled approach.

Limitations of extra strokes

There are some limitations in the use of extra strokes:

- 1 They must be played with the same ball as the main turn.
- 2 They may not be shared. They are specific to an individual player.
- 3 You cannot score a point for your own side with an extra stroke.
- 4 An extra stroke cannot be used during the 8 additional turns after time has been called. (If the hoop score is drawn after these turns then any remaining extra strokes may be used for the golden hoop.)
- 5 In best-of-3 matches, unused extra strokes may not be carried over to a subsequent game.

But you *can* use more than one extra stroke in succession.