Golf Croquet Pop-Up Coaching Session 1

Lead Coach – Stephen Custance-Baker

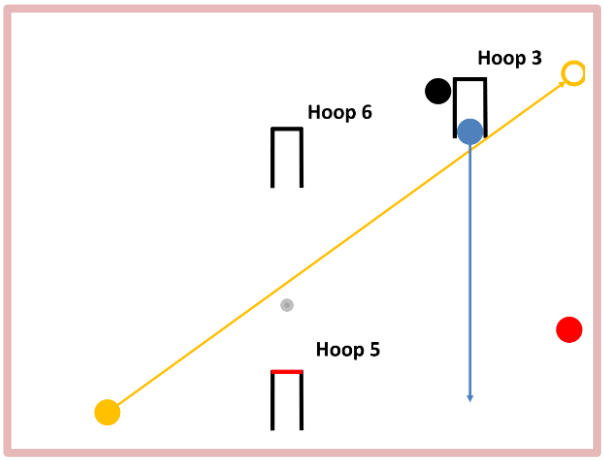
Sections
The consequence of success
Optimising partner / Partner support
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Playing a tiny shot
Ricochet peels

Taunton Deane Croquet Club
28th October 2026

The consequence of success

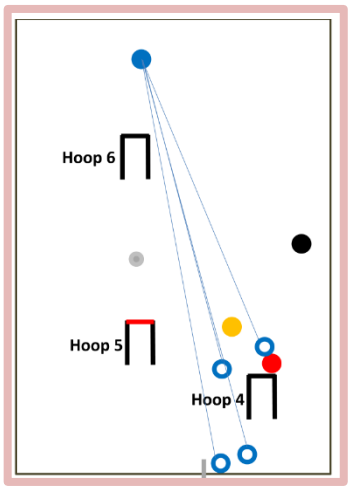
The theme of this section concerns the value of trying for a difficult shot, whether a hoop-run, positioning or a clearance. The fact that it's a difficult shot implies that there is a high likelihood of failure, but players already take that into account when choosing to play the stroke.
The aspect that many players don't give any consideration to is the possible downside of succeeding. If a successful shot will hardly improve your chances of winning the hoop or will leave you badly positioned for the next, it's probably not the best choice. This is when you should think about more beneficial options, i.e. the 'percentage' shot.

Exercise 1
This is a typical example of this situation. Blue is in the jaws of Hoop 3 and Black has cleared Yellow and left itself in a hoop-running position, wired from Red, which is offside.



Yellow could try a long shot to clear Blue from the hoop. If it fails, which is extremely likely, Blue will run the hoop, leaving Yellow near the corner and Red playing from the west penalty area.
If, however, it succeeds in clearing Blue from the hoop, Yellow will finish by the East boundary; Blue will either run the hoop or go to halfway; Red will return onside and Black will run the hoop.

But what is the alternative? Yellow could play to an onside position, trying to get on the line from Hoop 3 to Hoop 4. Although this means giving up Hoop 3, it will greatly improve the chance of challenging for Hoop 4.
Exercise 2
In another example of a long clearance, Blue, to play, has been cleared close to the North boundary. Red is in a good position to run Hoop 4, Yellow is also close, but Black is much further away.



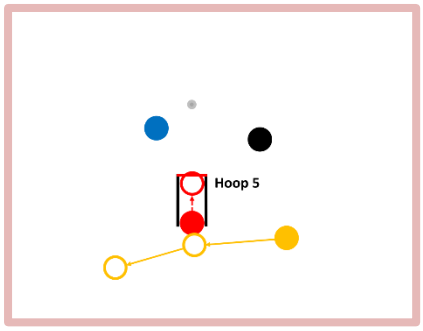
Many players will attempt the clearance of Red because it will probably run the hoop if it isn't cleared, and it's not obvious what the alternative is.
Consider first what will happen if Blue's shot succeeds in clearing Red, (which is a very low probability for most players). Blue will ricochet to a random position, probably off the South or East boundary. Wherever Red goes, it will return to a hoop-running position, leaving both Red and Yellow in front of the hoop.
If the shot by Blue misses, then Blue will be in the corner, but what alternatives are there?

The illustration shows three other possible positions for Blue, apart from the clearance.

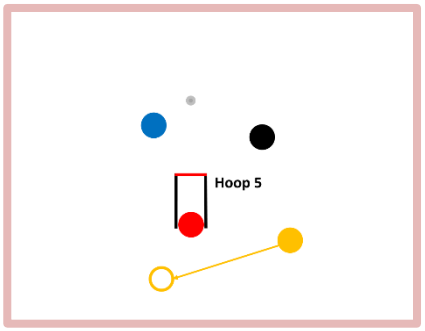
- South boundary, in a good position for approaching Hoop 5.
- Behind Hoop 4, in case Red fails to run through.
- In front of Hoop 4, in a good position for approaching Hoop 5 and also in a position to attempt a jump at Hoop 4 if Red fails to run it.

These are all better than being in the corner.

Exercise 3



There is sometimes a choice between peeling your partner or setting up a second ball. In this case, Red is likely to be cleared by Blue, but could be peeled by Yellow with a fine cut.



If the peel succeeds then Red and Yellow will have the hoop; Blue will play to Hoop 6, Red will probably be hampered and Black will play to Hoop 6. If Yellow fails to peel Red, it will finish in a poor position; Blue will clear Red to the South boundary and neither side will control the hoop.

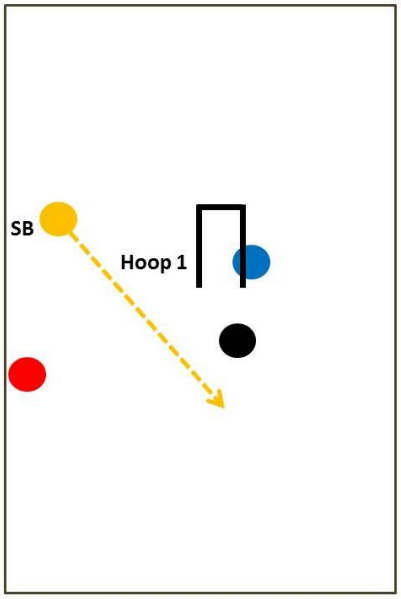
Alternatively, play Yellow to a hoop-running position, wired from Black. If Blue clears Red, it will return; Black has a choice of shots, but cannot clear Yellow. The result is that Red and Yellow will still be very likely to get Hoop 5 and be in a much better shape to contest Hoop 6.

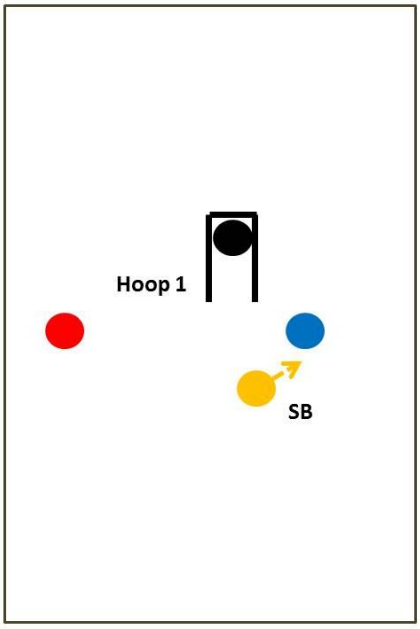
There are many situations where a difficult shot is possible and should be considered, but part of the decision should be an assessment of whether success in the shot will genuinely increase the chance of gaining the hoop. If the probable gain is, at best, marginal and failure will leave the ball in a much worse position, then think about an alternative shot that will give an advantage on the next hoop.

Optimising the use of partner

Exercise 4
Clearing with your second ball

If the opponent has a ball in front of the hoop which could be cleared by either of yours then put your first ball into position and use the second ball to clear the opponent. This decision depends on your confidence that Red can clear Black sufficiently far to make Yellow safe.

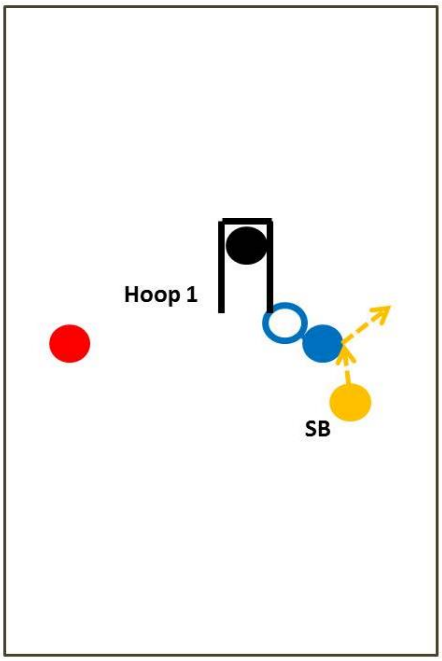


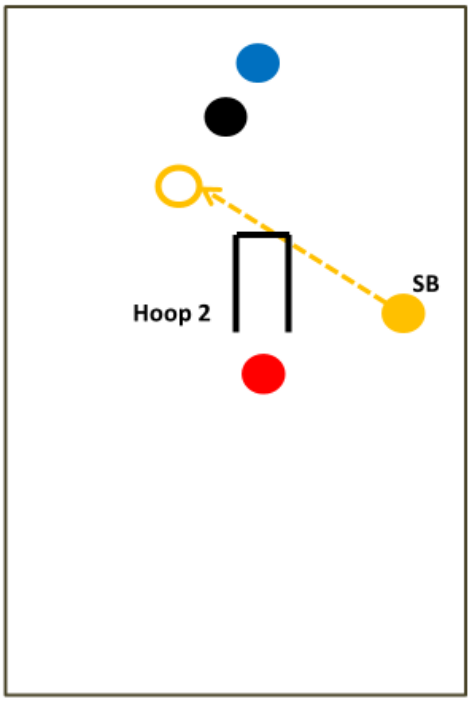


Exercise 5
Hamper the opponent's approach

After a hoop has been run you should try to be the first side to get a ball near to the next hoop. If your first ball doesn't have a clear run then use it to hamper the opponent so that your partner ball can be first. Don't risk going for a narrow gap. In this demo, use Yellow to hamper Blue.

An alternative to hampering with your ball is to put the opponent into a hampered position where it can neither run to the next hoop nor clear its partner.

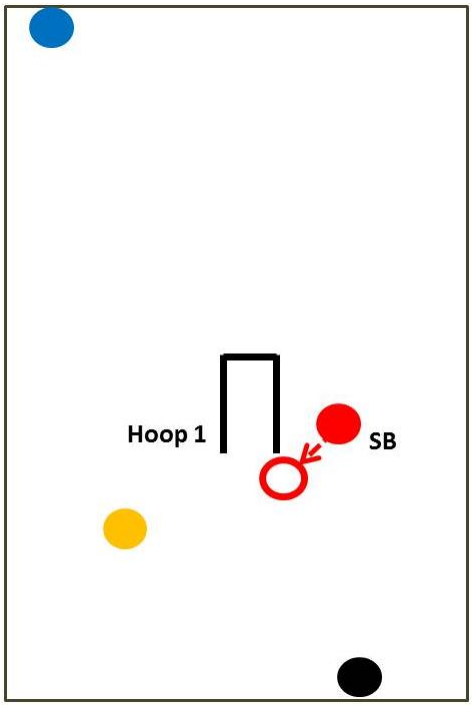




Exercise 6
Set up a promotion for your next shot

Situations can occur when thinking ahead enables you to set up a promotion. This is particularly true when the opponents are about to run a hoop or when your partner is in a position to run an even-numbered hoop.

In this section the main aim is to enhance partner's position, without necessarily moving it.



Exercise 7

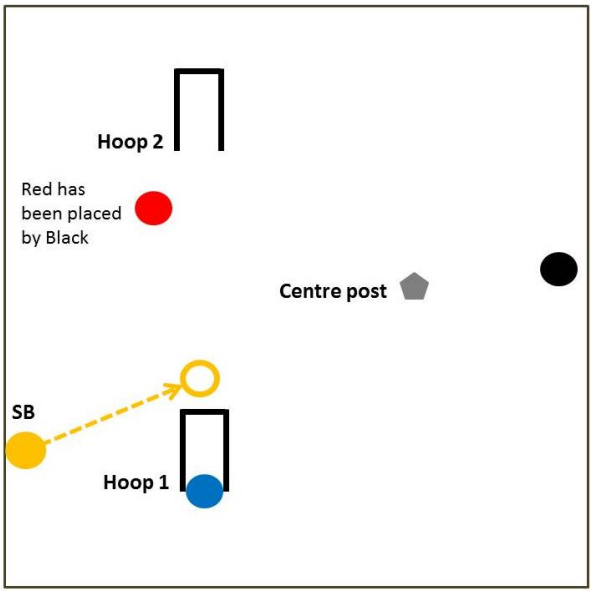
Blue has attempted the hoop, missed and gone a long way down the lawn. Red is to play but neither Red nor Yellow have a possible hoop shot. Red could set up in front of the hoop, blocking Black but would then be cleared by it.
Instead, try to place your ball in front of the near upright. This will block Black and set up an in-off for your partner.

This is not an easy shot, but if it is successful then Yellow, instead of being out of position, will have an easy hoop run.

If Black clears Yellow in order to avoid leaving the in-off then Black will be out of position and Yellow will return, giving you two in front of the hoop.

Exercise 8

If your partner ball is in a good position at the next hoop and not offside then it may be worth forcing the opponent to run the hoop.



In this exercise, Red was put in its current position by Black. Yellow could possibly clear Blue but could not keep position as well so Blue would simply come back. Red would then also have to come back on-side. If Yellow fails to clear Blue then Blue could remain in the jaws, forcing Red to come back and allowing Black to return.

Instead, put Yellow directly behind the hoop so that Blue is forced to run it, leaving Red clear for a shot at hoop 2. Yellow simultaneously blocks Blue and protects Red's position.

The Croquet Stroke

The AC croquet stroke is unfamiliar to many GC players but occurs sufficiently often to be worth learning. When you need to play a ball that is touching another, either an opponent or your partner, there are several strokes available to you.
These include the straight shots; Roll, Drive, Stop
and the angled shots; Fine take-off, Thick take-off, Split roll, Split stop shot, Sideways drag.
In AC, you can pick your ball up and place it where you want, as long as it's touching the ball you have just roqueted, whereas in GC you have to accept what's offered when the balls are touching. You need to be able to recognise what strokes are possible and to practise them.
The two main influences on the result of a croquet stroke are:

1 The tilt of the mallet shaft forward or backward at the moment of impact.
2 The angle of your swing off the line through the centres of the balls.

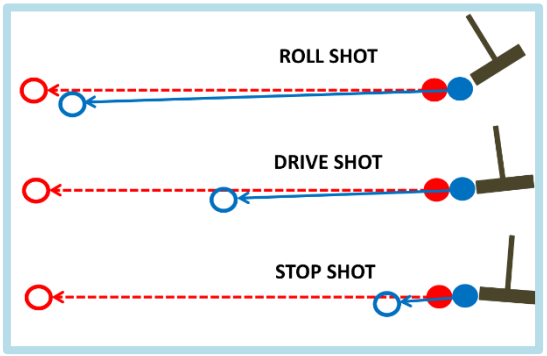
It is well worth trying the alternatives to see the effect of these two influences on the direction and distance travelled by the balls.

Straight shots

The balls happen to be lined up roughly in the direction you want both to go.
The more that the mallet shaft is tilted forwards in a 'roll' shot, the more that the balls will travel the same distance. As the shaft is raised closer to the vertical, the more that the target ball will travel relative to the striker's ball. A vertical shaft will give the 'drive' shot in which the target ball will travel much further, perhaps 5 times or more, than the striker's ball.
Finally, the shaft tilted backwards gives the stop shot, in which the striker's ball only travels a small fraction of the distance of the target ball.

Exercise 9

Try each of the mallet positions, hitting straight along the line of the two balls.

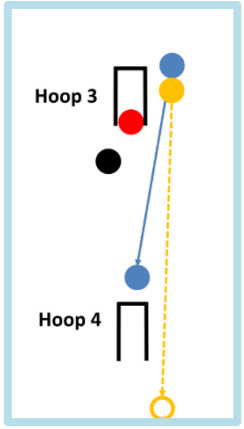


1 to 1 distance ratio

2 to 1 or 8 to 1 distance ratio

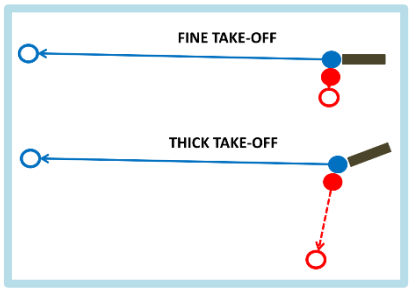
10 to 1 or 20 to 1 distance ratio

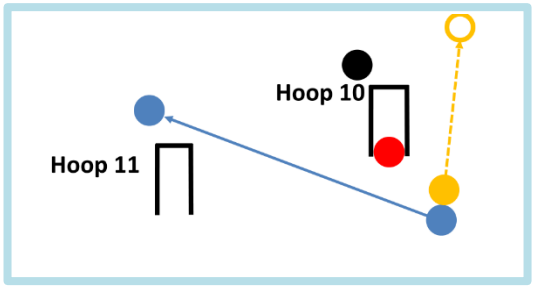
One example of a use for the drive shot is when an opponent has blocked your jump shot but left their ball in contact. Play a drive shot to put them off the far boundary and yourself at the next hoop. Red must run 3 or be cleared by Black.



A Take-off Shot is intended to send the striker's ball much further than the target ball. These can be played with various different mallet tilts, but it is the mallet's angle of strike that is most influential.
It's possible to play a stroke, when two balls are touching, that hardly moves the other ball at all. This stroke, the Fine Take-off, allows the striker to aim almost exactly in the direction that they want to go and is very useful when deliberately playing to an offside position at the next hoop. Alternatively, the balls may be so positioned that you need a Thick Take-off to get to the next hoop.

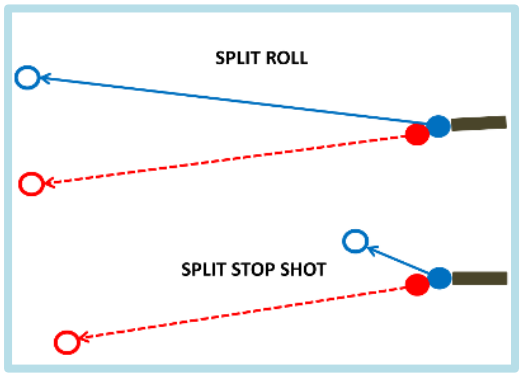
Exercise 10



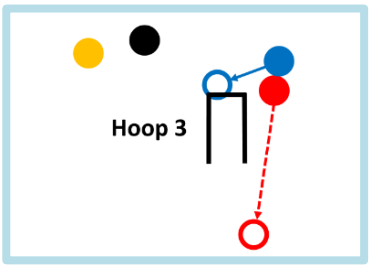


With a split shot, the player is trying to send the balls in different directions, with the target ball travelling as far as, or further than, the striker's ball. If they are intended to travel about the same distance, then a split roll is used, in which the mallet is tilted forwards and played 'through' the ball, i.e. with plenty of follow-through. There must be a clear single contact, to avoid any suggestion of 'push'.

Exercise 11



Although both are used, the Split Stop Shot is a variant of this and enables a player to send the opponent away and themselves into a good position.



It is played with the mallet striking the ball upwards, like a standard stop shot, but angled to one side.

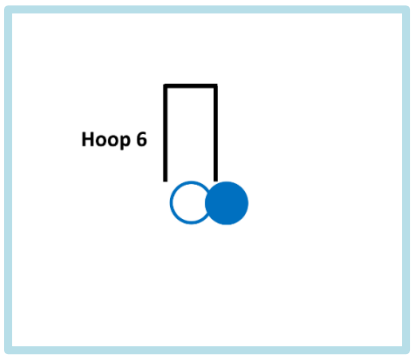
Tiny shots

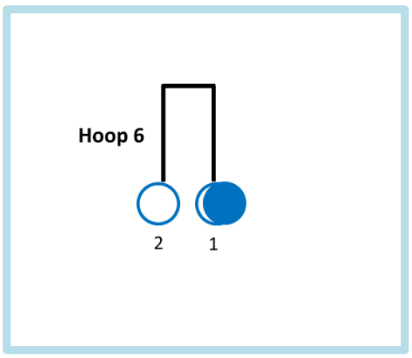
A common positioning shot that often causes problems is the tiny shot, i.e. 1 to 3 inches, to get the ball into a perfect position.

Surely anyone can hit a ball 3 inches – can't they? Yes, they can but, all too often, they don't, and the ball goes 0 or 6 inches. The mallet control needed for hitting such a precise distance takes a long time to acquire and can only be achieved confidently with a smooth swing. A jerky or abrupt swing will make it very difficult to get the ball to move exactly as required.

If you can get the ball exactly in front of, and very close to, the hoop, you make life very difficult for the opponent who make be left with a risky clearance or jump shot.

Exercise 12

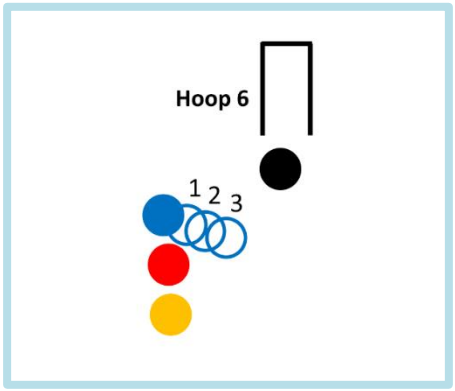




This shot, if played very slowly, is prone to become a 'push' and this is where a pendulum swing is useful. By gradually reducing the backswing, until it feels right, it's possible to hit the ball smoothly over a very small distance, but remember that some lawns simply do not allow such precision.

Exercise 13

A similar precision is required when playing a very short blocking shot.



In this situation, Blue needs to protect Black from being cleared by Red. Blue cannot clear Red and would be likely to commit a fault if it tried.

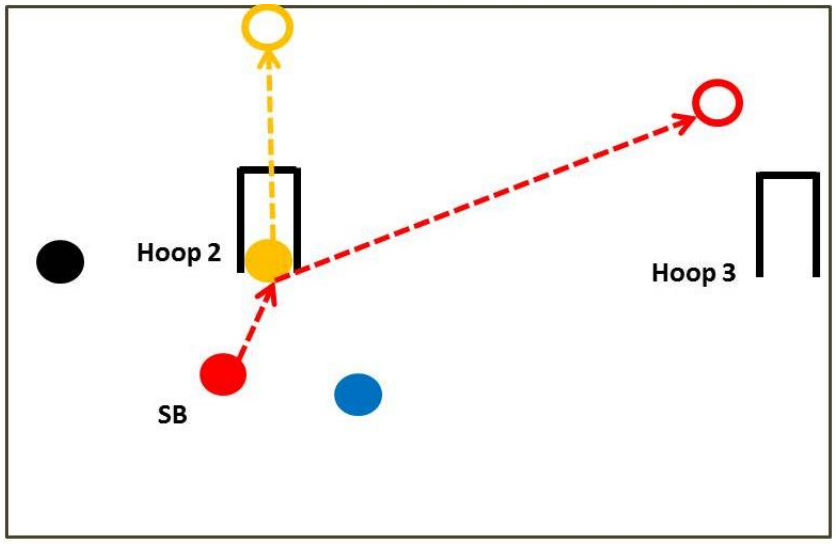
Any of the three blocking positions shown would stop the simple clearance but only the shortest one would actually protect Black. In the second position, Blue could be stop-shotted onto Black and in the third position it could be cut onto Black.

Ricochet peels

The ricochet peel, used only at even-numbered hoops, is a very strong combination of shots. If it can be set up without risking the hoop then it is a relatively easy shot to execute as the final position of the peeled ball doesn't matter. (This is why it is a ricochet, rather than a rush.)

Exercise 14

Start setting this up by putting one ball in front of the hoop but on the side away from the next hoop, i.e. on the west side if the next hoop is 3. Then put the partner ball into the jaws if this can be done without compromising the hoop. If possible, the ball should be about half-way through the hoop. Any less and it is vulnerable to being removed; any more and the ricochet becomes difficult.

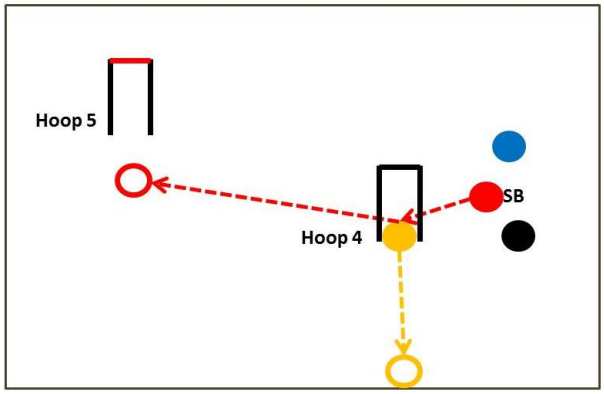


The exercise involves the placement of the first ball to optimise the angle, the nestling of the second ball to the right depth in the hoop and then the ricochet peel stroke, concentrating on getting the striker ball to a good position on the next hoop.

The same shot is used at hoop 8.

If this shot is being played at hoop 4 (or hoop 10) then the Red ball should be in a wide position, to give a fine cut, but if it is at hoop 6 then the Red should be almost straight in front.

Exercise 15



Exercise 16

