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How to Play

Expert Croquet Tactics Article 1: The Triple Peel

By Keith F Wylie

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Article 1: The Triple Peel

“No, I don’t want to watch that game – it’s another Boring Old Triple”, said a seasoned spectator.

“Quite”, I replied, “and if there’s one thing more boring than that it’s a Boring Old Failed Triple.”

“The trade-mark of the expert and the ambition of most up-and-coming croquet players is the triple peel.”

J.W. Solomon

“There is no position too difficult for a triple to be achieved, no position too easy for it to be missed.”

E.P.C. Cotter

Part I General

1.I.1 Introduction

I assume that you know the manoeuvres of the standard triple and that you appreciate that on an easy court it calls for no more than a few simple strokes played with reasonable accuracy. I do not assume you to be an expert yet: indeed in Parts I to IV you will be regularly and unflatteringly reminded of your fallibility.

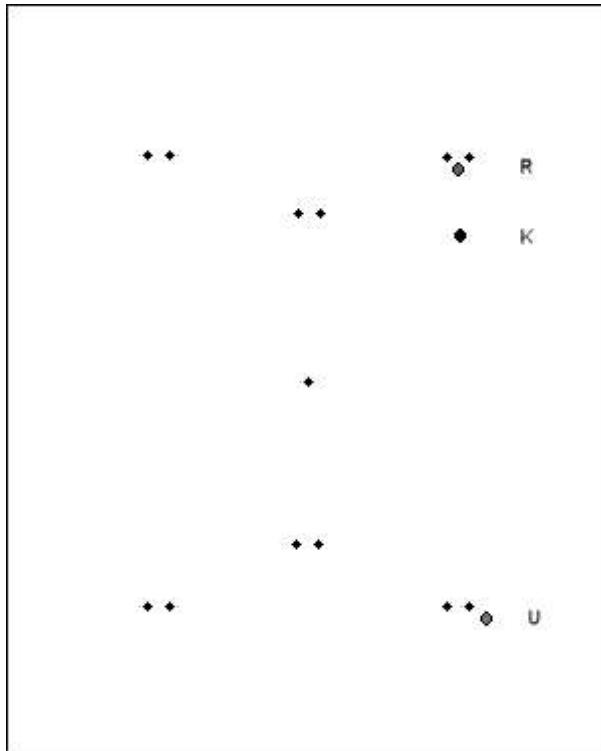
This Article is mainly concerned with the organisation of peeling breaks. Only a handful of players organise their triple peels reasonably well. Too often players rely on accurate play, and when that lets them down or when playing conditions are difficult they come unstuck. For instance, in the first-string singles in a 1982 Test match one player was going out with a triple. He had only to do a straight rover peel and had all the balls ideally placed when he ran penult. He got his forward rush. He then croqueted both opponent balls and for no good reason kept them both at rover, with the result that when the rover peel stuck (the hoops were firm and the balls new) he could not afford to jump hard. He lost the game, which he would not have done if he had put a ball near the end of A baulk before doing the peel.

There are some who would say that the true test of the expert peeler is the sextuple, but I should disagree. Too many players are in a hurry to do sextuples. A few succeed, but after all if people try them often enough that is what you would expect. No, in my view the real sign of the expert is that time and again he completes triple peels even when they go wrong.

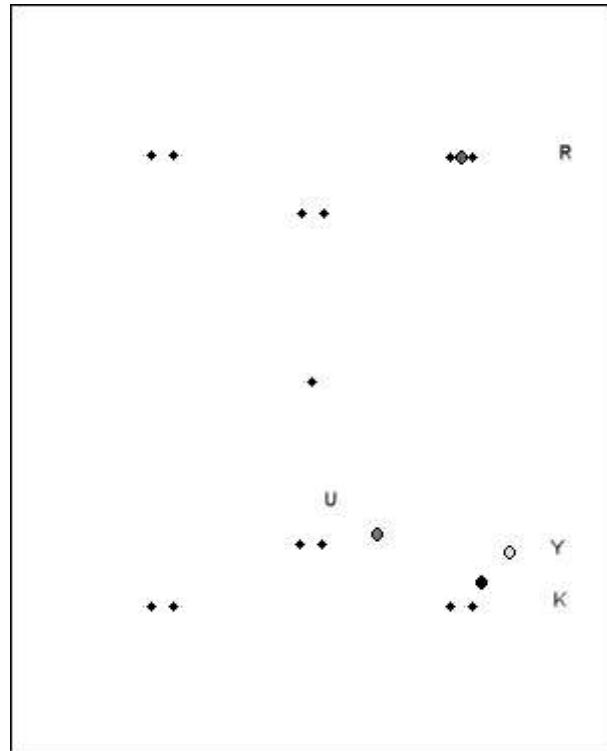
In this Article I shall adopt the convention that you are playing with Y and peeling R. I shall generally not deal with the triple peel of an opponent. That calls for a slightly different set of values because it is then more important to get peels done.

1.I.2 A Quiz

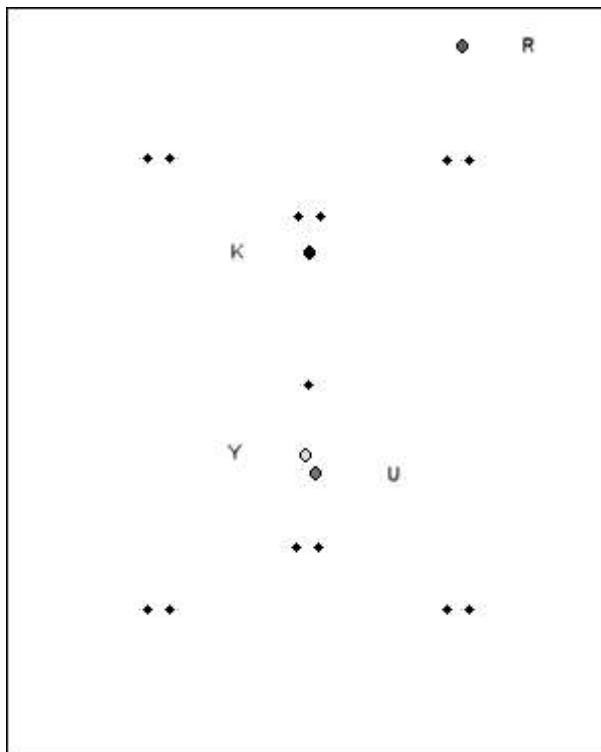
Before the Article proper, here is a short quiz for you to try. Some of the problems are easy but some you may consider difficult. Each has a point. I shall give the answers during the course of the Article. What would you do *in a match* (for this is no mere academic exercise)? Remember that the answers must take into account the likelihood that not every stroke will come off as you intend. What then? Remember too that you are playing to win, so do not show off or put the break at risk. Try to solve the problems before reading the answers. Problems 1.1 and 1.5 are the most difficult. For ease of reference an Index appears at the end of the Article.

*Fig. 1.1 (Y for 3b, croqueting U; R for 4b)*

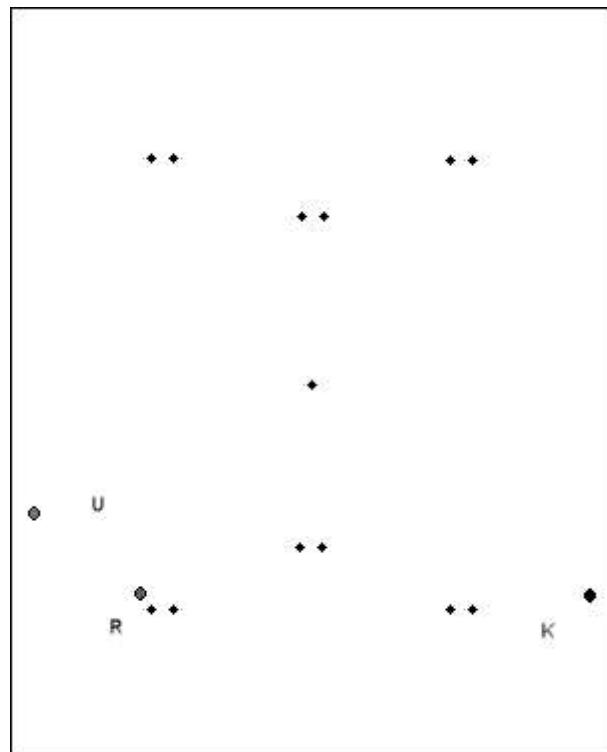
Problem 1.1: R is for 4b. You are about to approach 3b off U. R has not quite entered the jaws of the hoop.

*Fig. 1.2 (Y for 4; R for 4b)*

Problem 1.2: R is for 4b. You are about to make 4 off K.

*Fig. 1.3 (Y has just run 5, R for penult)*

Problem 1.3: R is for penult. You have just run 5. You had a perfect break when for 3, but have gradually let it slip.

*Fig. 1.4 (Y for 2b, croqueting U; R for penult)*

Problem 1.4: R is for penult. You have just made 1b and rushed U to the position shown.

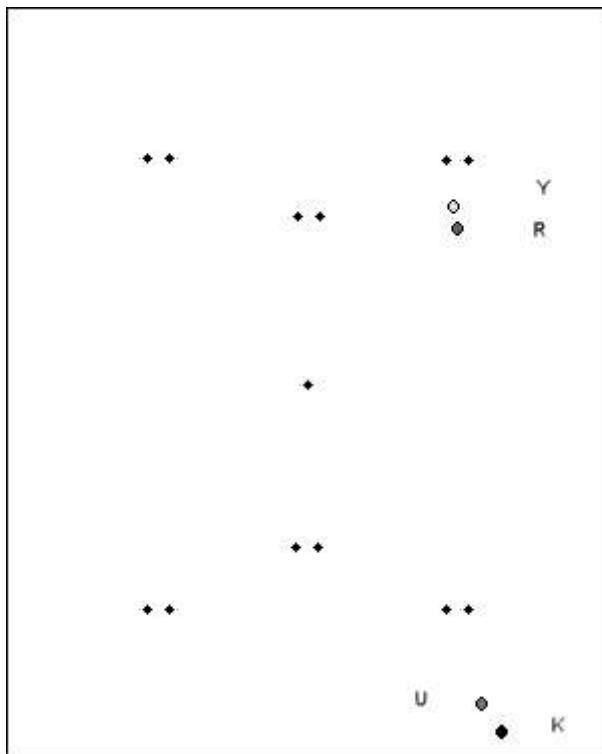


Fig. 1.5 (Y has just run 3; R for 4b)

Problem 1.5: R is for 4b. You have just run 3 and have got a rush of about $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet towards U and K. U is about one yard North and one yard West of K, which is on the yard-line.

1.1.3 Simple break organisation

The art of making 3- and 4-ball breaks has many refinements. You can get by without knowing them if you are just making breaks, but if you propose to do some peeling you need to do everything you can to keep control of the break. I shall try to illustrate the attitude towards break-making that I advocate, though clearly I cannot embark on a lengthy discussion of the subject.

In Fig. 1.6 careless play around 3b has forced you (playing Y, remember) to leave K behind. You have rushed U and are about to send it to penult. R is for rover. When you are coaching a complete beginner you may tell him to try to send U to spot (1), and indeed you may send it there yourself if R is for the peg. However, if you propose to peel R through rover you should send U to spot (2). You need to position R very accurately at rover after 4b, and it is easier to do this from spot (4) than from spot (3).

(Now before you turn the page, have you done the quiz? Do it now. By trying it before reading my answers you will sharpen your wits and will prepare yourself to criticise what I say. Perhaps I shall be wrong. More to the point my answers may be wrong for you personally.)

One of the agreeable features of Fig. 1.6 is that U will still be a good pioneer even if you overhit it or underhit it because it is being sent from the right direction. Now let us go back one stroke to when you had a rush on U from near where K is. You might have considered rushing U to spot (5) so as to make it easier to get behind R. That would have been wrong because when you send U to penult from spot (5) you do need to be careful not to overhit it or to underhit it.

Anyway you do not really need to get a rush on R. In Fig. 1.7 you have just run 5 and roqueted U. R is for penult. You had meant to rush U forward and to send it to 1b. If you are wearing blinkers you will carry on with that plan. Then, after

You will see that all the positions except for 1.5 have arisen as a result of some inaccuracy or other. In 1.1, K is too far South. In 1.2, R has stuck and U is out of position. In 1.3, R and Y have gone too far through 4b and 5 respectively. In 1.4, you had to leave a ball behind after 4 and so left off peeling for a while. These are typical situations, and if you want to be a reliable triple peeler you have to be able to cope with them. They also illustrate (I hope) the thinking side of the triple peel. In each case you need to make the correct *choice* of stroke.

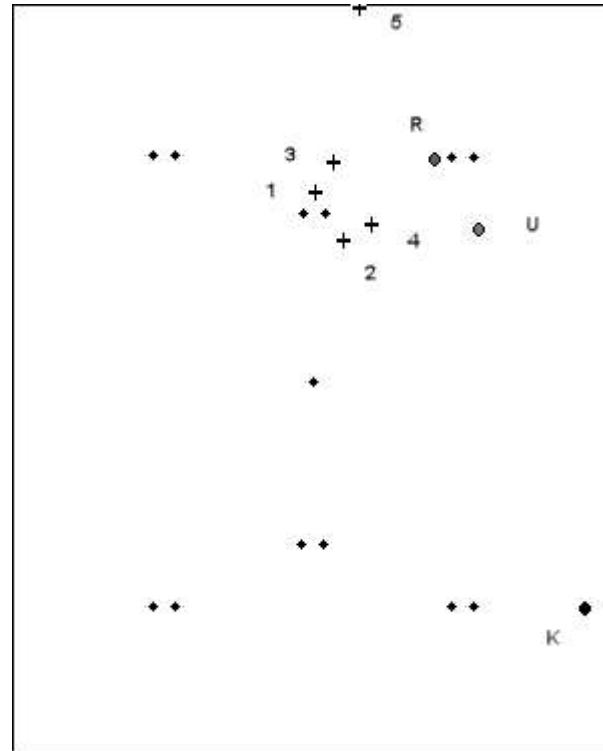


Fig. 1.6 (Y for 4b, croqueting U; R for rover)

sending U too far past 1b and consequently failing to get K up to 2b as a pioneer, you will break down and not know why. Here is why: in Fig. 1.7 you should swap the roles you had previously allotted to U and K, and send U to penult (possibly not very accurately) and K to 1b (accurately from short range). With R so near to penult you should peel successfully after 6 however mispositioned U may be, and with K in place at 1b you will have no trouble in sending U accurately to 2b.

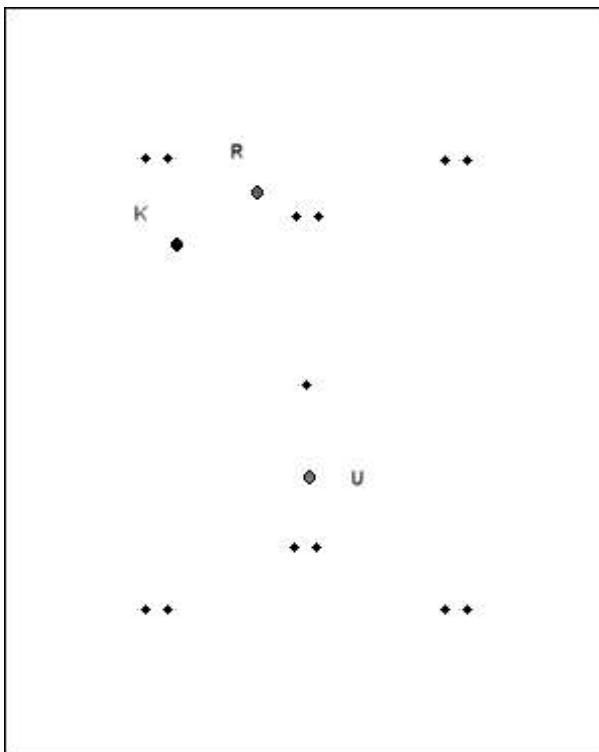


Fig. 1.7 (Y for 6, croqueting U; R for penult)

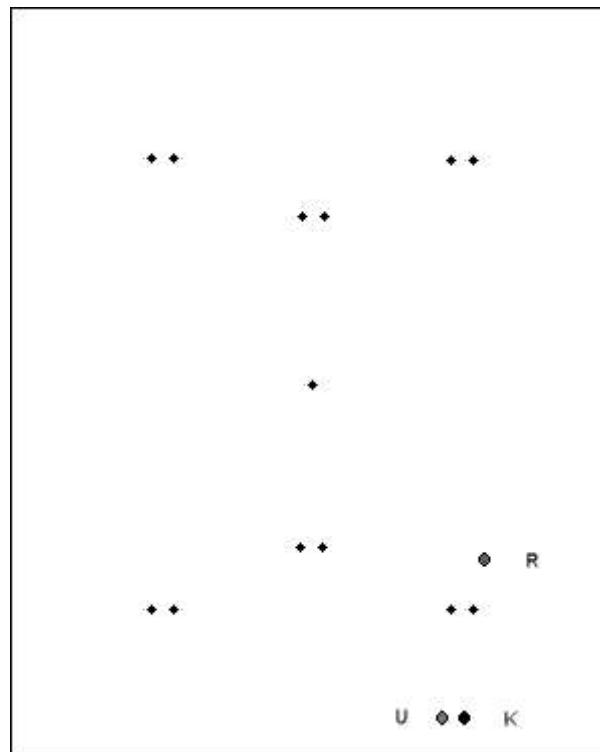


Fig. 1.8 (Y for 4, croqueting U; R for 4b)

In Fig. 1.8 you have just run 3 and rushed U to the boundary a foot or so from K. R is for 4b. Clearly in the immediate future you want a ball at 5 and you aim to peel R through 4b before 6. The two “obvious” ways of setting this up are both wrong. The first of these is to stop-shot U to 5 and then to send K to the centre of the court going to R. That is wrong for two reasons: (a) because you want your pioneer a little to the North-East of 5 (compare Fig. 1.6) and U is coming from the wrong direction for maximum accuracy; and (b) because it is difficult to get behind R from where K is. (You avoid the so-called bad luck of having your ball run into R or the fourth hoop by steering clear of the furniture.) The second wrong method is to stop-shot U towards the non-playing side of 4, to rush K past R and to send K to 5. That method does at least send the pioneer to 5 from the right direction, but you are likely to have to send U down to 4b from a very long way away after making 4 so that it may not be sufficiently accurately placed for the peel before 6.

The correct method is to play what is sometimes called a “pseudo-cannon” or “open cannon” (see Part II of Article 3). This stunningly simple stroke is sadly too complicated for most players of “lawn chess”. I leave you to satisfy yourself that it does indeed solve all the problems of the position: you get K on the non-playing side of 5, get your rush on R and send both U and R to 4b from about level with the fifth hoop. If the idea is new to you, you may care to reconsider your answer to Problem 1.5, the solution to which comes later on. (This slight hint is meant to act as a stimulus. It does not reveal the “stunningly simple” solution.)

I have shown just a few examples of what I regard as basic break hygiene. This is a digression from the theme of the Article and I do not pretend to have covered the topic. Break hygiene is largely a matter of constant vigilance and intelligent anticipation. I have drawn attention to (a) sending the pioneer from the correct direction, (b) sending the pioneer to the correct side of the hoop, (c) swapping pioneers and (d) looking out for unusual strokes. Further examples of these occur in the course of the Article.

At this point I shall deal with Problem 1.4 as it involves break organisation and nothing else. The key is to send U not in front of 3b but a little to its non-playing side and a little past it, so that after you have made 2b and rushed R somewhere near IV you can easily send both R and K down to penult. Not a difficult problem, but not everyone will get it right.

1.I.4 Priorities

When you are peeling, you should generally attend to the following considerations in the following order of importance:

- Keeping the break going with safety.
- Getting the peeled ball to the right place at the right time.
- Soberly assessing the prospects of success of each peel attempt.
- Intelligent positioning of pioneers.

Items (1) and (2) are fairly obvious and I have just illustrated (4). Item (3) is less obvious. In a sense it is just a matter of judgment and experience. Here is an example of what I mean. In Fig. 1.9 you have just made 4 and rushed U. R is for 4b. You can peel Rafter 5 or before 1b. Your situation will fall into one of three categories:

(a) If playing conditions are easy then the peel after 5 is possible and the peel before 1b probable. As there are obvious advantages to the former you plan to try them both, but you put your chief effort into manoeuvring for the peel before 1b because that is your better chance. In particular, you do everything you can to have a really good pioneer at 1b (without which the peel would be impracticable), my personal spot being 2 yards North and 1 yard East of 1b. To get a ball there accurately it is an advantage to have your pioneer at 6 placed rather towards 1b so that the positioning of the 1b pioneer can be done from short range. Therefore you concentrate in Fig. 1.9 on getting a really well placed pioneer to the left of 6. If you choose to send U to 6, get U right and do not worry about the rush on K; and if you choose to send U to 4b, do not worry about its exact position but concentrate on getting a really good rush on K.

(b) In some circumstances you may take the view that the peel after 5 is so unlikely to succeed that any attempt at it will serve only to interfere with your preparation for the peel before 1b. In that case you send a ball to the peg instead of to 4b.

(c) Occasionally, when you are badly off form or when playing conditions are tricky, you will feel that to try the standard peel before 1b will seriously put the break at risk. In that case the peel after 5 will presumably be too difficult to be worth trying. Even though you feel constrained to avoid the usual ways of getting the 4b peel done, you can always make a speculative attempt at something less conventional. You make 5 with one ball at the peg and the other at 6, and then send R to somewhere around spot (1). The peg ball goes to 1b and you approach 6 with a little stop shot sending the pilot ball well North. If you are lucky, you will be able to rush R in front of 4b immediately after running 6 and to do the peel there and then.

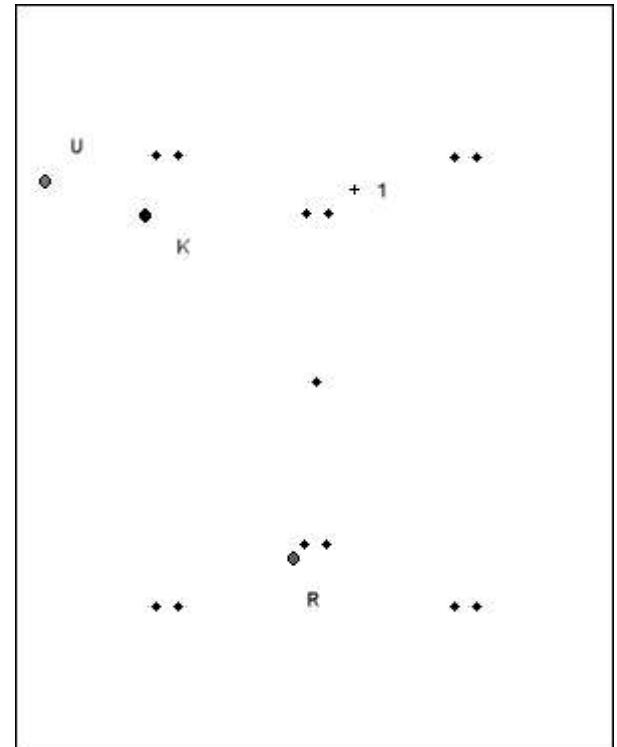


Fig. 1.9 (Y for 5, croqueting U; R for 4b)

1.I.5 Jawsing and hugging

Deliberately putting the peeled ball in the jaws of its hoop and roqueting it through later is a manoeuvre that is too seldom used. One of the most interesting turns to watch is the triple peel in which the player does this at every peeling hoop. Careful planning can make this a completely safe and successful break. Peeling becomes so much easier when you know that all you need to do is to jaws the ball.

As a general proposition, to which exceptions do occasionally arise, you should avoid leaving the peeled ball too near to its hoop (you may become wired) or in an ideal peeling position (you may have to roquet it away). The peeled ball should not hug its hoop in anticipation. It should keep its distance and leave a little room for manoeuvre.

1.I.6 In my end is my beginning

Novice peelers are given to breaking down because they try the 4b peel before getting control of the break in a misguided attempt to keep up with some supposed schedule. Also, they are to be seen practising triple peels for hours on end without any perceptible success. Both experiences serve only to discourage. I have some advice for them, but it will not be popular. (I can remember what it's like!) First, do not try triples, either in a match or in practice, unless you are playing well enough to do 3-ball breaks and to do them well. Be honest with yourself over this. Second, before practising triple peels seriously you should first become really adept at the delayed double peel, that is to say the penult peel before 4b and the straight rover peel. Start practising with a laid 4-ball break from 2b with R as pivot ball and progress to a laid 3-ball break from 6 with R stuck halfway through 4b. Once you have mastered that you will learn to relax when doing the 4b peel. Two of the keys to the triple are to have complete mastery of the final stages and not to be in too much of a hurry.

1.I.7 A haunted hoop

Whether the peeled ball is for 4b, penult or rover, you will generally find yourself wanting a good forward rush after 3b. This desire is one of the commonest causes of breaking down during the triple. Make a special point of lavishing great care on the positioning and subsequent rushing of the 3b pioneer. Cultivate the drive approach from 3 to 6 feet in front of the hoop, a stroke which not everyone has.

1.I.8 Pull

This article is about break organisation, and I propose to say nothing about the mechanics of pull. It is a difficult and controversial subject. Without pull there is a danger of the triple becoming far too easy. In my view it is an essential feature of the design of croquet balls that they should have plenty of pull. You can use pull to your advantage when you are doing a long peel and are having difficult lining up the balls precisely. By aiming slightly to the left or right you can make any necessary fine adjustment.

Because of the uncertainty which pull brings into the split shot, peels are considerably more likely to succeed if done with a straight stop shot. There are two ways of arranging for this, the elegant and the rustic. The elegant way calls for accurate preparation so that after the peel you have an easy rush on a nearby ball ("the escape ball"). The peeled ball and the escape ball must be in just the right relative positions when you do the peel. The rustic way involves a stop shot peel leaving no rush on the escape ball or, in its most extreme form, not even a short coquet. The rustic way is used by players who are good at long rolls and 7-yard roquets. It is correct to capitalise on these skills if you have them. For example, suppose you have set up a standard triple with a perfect pioneer at 4 but your peel is from four feet and your escape ball is well to one side. The balls are new, so that a split shot peel will be a complete lottery. You may now do a stop shot peel, but only if you are really good at the ensuing roll to 4. Do not be tempted to copy manoeuvres like this just because you have seen them done by other people. Exercise your own judgment and do not put the break at risk.

1.I.9 An answer is not always required

This is perhaps a convenient point at which to discuss Problem 1.3. This was to some extent a trick question to catch those who expected every Problem to have an aggressive Answer. How many rustic readers did a split roll to R so as not to fall behind schedule in the standard triple? What short memories they had. The break has been pretty ragged so far: an intemperate 4b peel, a failure to rush K back to R after 4 and a failure to get the forward rush after 5. The time has come for you to steady yourself. There are two courses open to you. I regard them both as playable, the choice depending on how you are feeling at the time. The more aggressive one is this: take off to R and send it to 1b make 6, send K to 2b and leave U at penult, hoping to be able after making 1b to rush R in front of penult and to peel it. The more docile way is to send U to 1b and to ignore R until after 6, when you simply concentrate on rebuilding the 4-ball break which you have lost. With any luck you will be able to peel R through penult just before making 4b. The point in this problem is the need to temper flair with wisdom. Play to your form. Remember priorities (1) and (3). This position is not suitable for heroics.

1.I.10 Experto crede

Before getting down to details, I ought to return to something I said at the beginning. Players too often rely on their accurate play to bring home their triples. You can ignore all the advice in this Article and still complete triples regularly if you are skilful and reasonably lucky. One of our leading players saw Problem 1.4 in draft and said that he would send U in front of 3b because he would be confident of rushing K a little towards IV after sending R to penult. How neatly this remark epitomised the attitude which I am advising you to avoid! No matter how good you are, you should approach the triple peel with utter humility. Foresee what may go wrong and, where possible, take anticipatory action. Putting U North of 3b in Problem 1.4 may look as if you were proclaiming that you had no confidence in your ability to make 2b and to rush R four yards South of K. Such apparent defeatism is deceptive. You will at first earn few admirers by sending U to the "wrong" side of 3b but before long "That's not much of a pioneer" will give way to "I wonder why he put it there?"

I shall be discussing manoeuvres which some players come to do almost instinctively, though they will be entirely new to many less experienced readers. Can reading this Article be an adequate substitute for learning the hard way?

Part II: The 4-Back Peel

By and large, the sooner you get the 4b peel done the better. Preparation for it often begins before you have established a 4-ball break. I discuss a few useful tricks for accelerating the development of the break in Part VI of this Article and in Part II of Article 3. This Part contains only uncomplicated material.

1.II.1 The 4b peel before 3

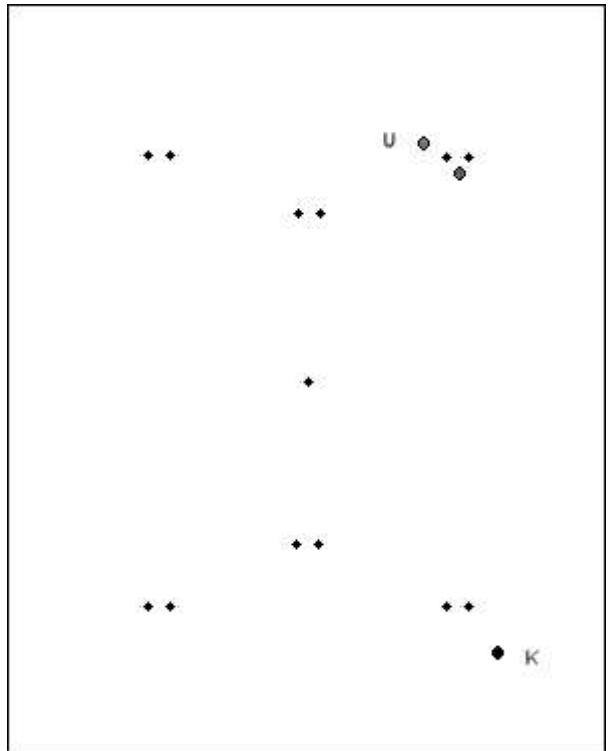


Fig. 1.10 (Y for 3, croqueting R)

1.II.2 The 4b peel after 3

Even when you have early control of all four balls you should not position the escape ball at 3 without a little thought.

Here is Cotter (Page 80, colours transposed):

“Y then roquets U and croquets it a yard below and about two feet one side or the other of 3, getting position to rush four to six inches to the side of the hoop. A simple croquet stroke will put Y in position to run 3 and R in position to be peeled through 4b about a foot away. That is the distance I like ... because in any break once established an unnecessarily difficult shot is merely an indication of previous misplay.”

Solomon (Page 57) has:

“... send [U] a foot or so to one side or other of the hoop and about a yard behind it ... If you know that you will have enough control to approach from very close you need not send [U] quite so far past the hoop, but it is wise to have it a little to one side or you may be hoop-bound when you have done the peel.”

Both authors envisage your getting a good rush on U after the peel. Cotter describes an ideal peel typical of his precision croquet and Solomon is only a little more realistic. Their advice is best taken as setting the standards of accuracy which they achieved and for which we should all strive, rather than as describing everyday tactics. Cotter and Solomon played and wrote in the age of the Old Standard Leave (see Article 2), when a strong player could expect to have complete control of the triple by hoop 3. Other leaves tend to give you rather less control at that stage. Besides, I take it that my readers are not wholly unacquainted with the occasional “previous misplay”. Undoubtedly the surest way of doing the 4b peel after 3 is to keep both balls as close to the hoop as is reasonably possible, but in the following pages I shall deal with what one might term “the coarse triple”.

I take Fig. 1.11 as typifying the degree of control which you may have after you have made 2, croqueted K and roqueted U. You will get a good rush on R but it would be wrong to suppose that you will rush it “four to six inches to the side of the hoop”. Indeed you would be stupid to try it, for you might rush it too near to the hoop. Your best tactics are to try to rush R to about 2 feet on the playing side of the third hoop and 1½ feet to one side, so that only an abnormally bad stroke will send R to a position from which it is not easy to set up the peel. I do not share the concern of Cotter and Solomon about not placing U on the line of the hoop. Only a complete chump finds himself hampered after the peel. If U is on the line, you can consider sending R a little to the side. Stop shot peels from a slight angle are very easy. If I am croqueting U from a spot which is nearly in front of the hoop or directly behind it, I do of course make a point of placing it slightly off the line; but if I am croqueting it from well to one side as in Fig. 1.11 I aim for the line itself. If U is on the line a problem is that you run the risk of roqueting it in the hoop stroke. There are two solutions. One, which only really applies when U is within 4 feet or so of the hoop, is to use R to cannon it off the line. The other is to have sent U out of range of the hoop stroke in the first place.

My advice in ragged positions like Fig. 1.11 is to send U about 2 yards below 3. When K is at K₁ or K₂ you do not need a good rush on U after the peel: any old roquet in roughly the right direction will do. Only when K is at K₃ do you need a good rush. To get it, you deliberately send R a foot or two short of U when approaching 3. You give yourself quite a long peel but

you ought to be able to do it with a stop shot. By sending U two yards below 3 you deprive yourself of a nice tidy peel, but you are amply compensated by avoiding (a) the split shot peel and (b) the roquet of the escape ball in the hoop stroke.

As may appear from that, I find stop shot peels from up to 4 or 5 feet straightforward. I do them at quite a steady pace and am usually content to see them stick in the jaws of 4b. At the opposite pole from me there are respected players whose attitude to the triple is so conservative that in a vital match they seem to prefer to abandon the triple completely if it does not work perfectly. Novice peelers should err on the side of caution and should generally make a positive effort to make a complete 4b peel after 3. They should not settle for a jawsing of this particular peel until they have learnt to deal with the subsequent complications. For the rest, you must exercise your own judgment.

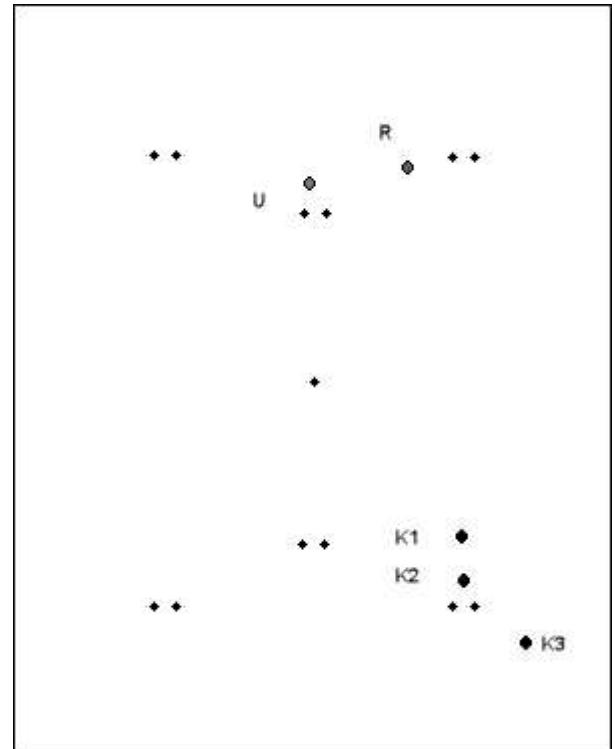


Fig. 1.11 (Y for 3, croqueting U)

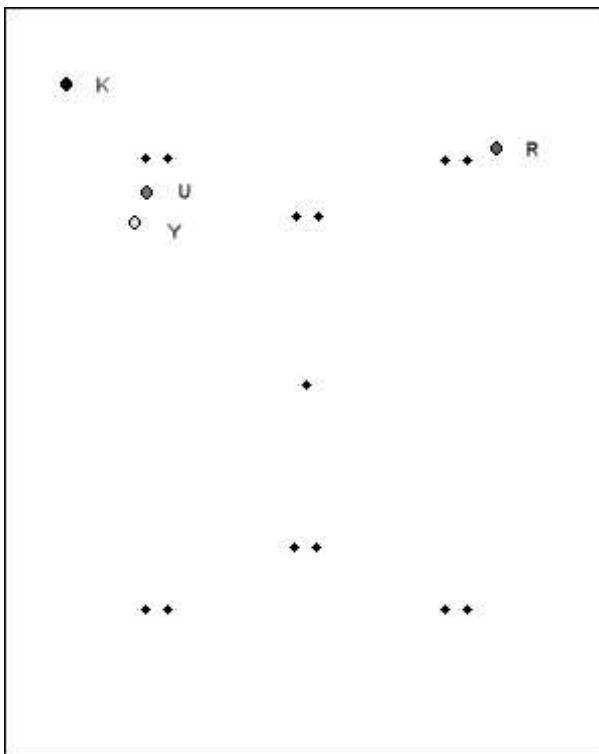


Fig. 1.12 (Y for 2)

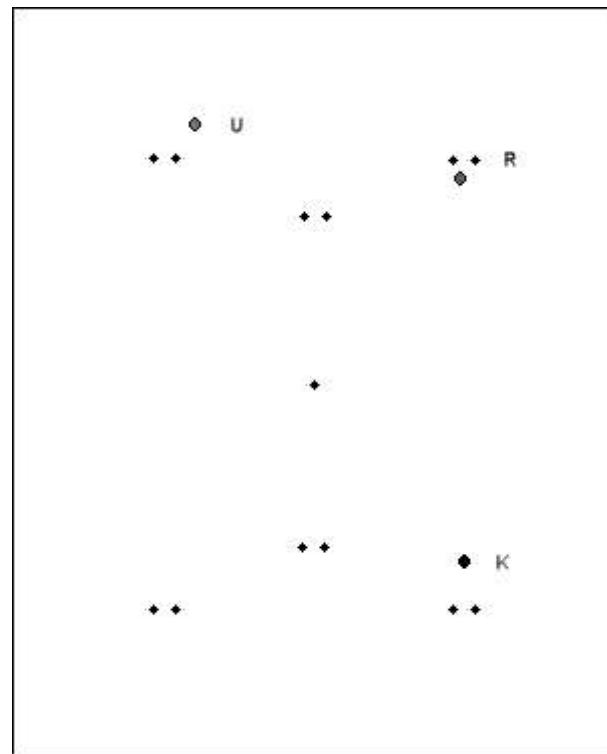


Fig. 1.13 (Y for 4, croqueting R)

When peeling after 3 you do not have to have the escape ball by the third hoop. It can be a considerable way away. In Fig. 1.12 you are about to make 2 off U. From this, you can develop the position in Fig. 1.13 after you have made 3 and roqueted R. You should not try the peel unless you are pretty confident of getting at least some sort of rush on U afterwards, though if you do fail to get the rush there are ways of regaining control in time to continue the standard triple. Notice the temptation to send U nearer the centre of the lawn after making 2, which you must resist if you want to peel after 3. In Fig. 1.14 you are about to approach 3 off R. If (but only if) you are good at the roll from III to 4, make 3 and peel R going to U. Precision croquet enthusiasts (see Article 3) might be tempted to take off from U to K after doing the peel, the idea being to make 4 and 5 off K, but they will get no encouragement from me. They will be better off going for the delayed triple which is there for the taking.

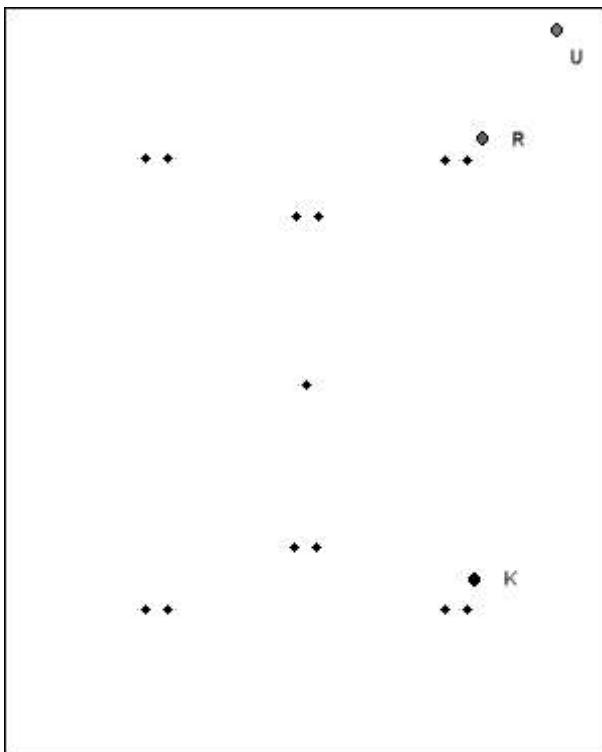


Fig. 1.14 (Y for 3, croqueting R)

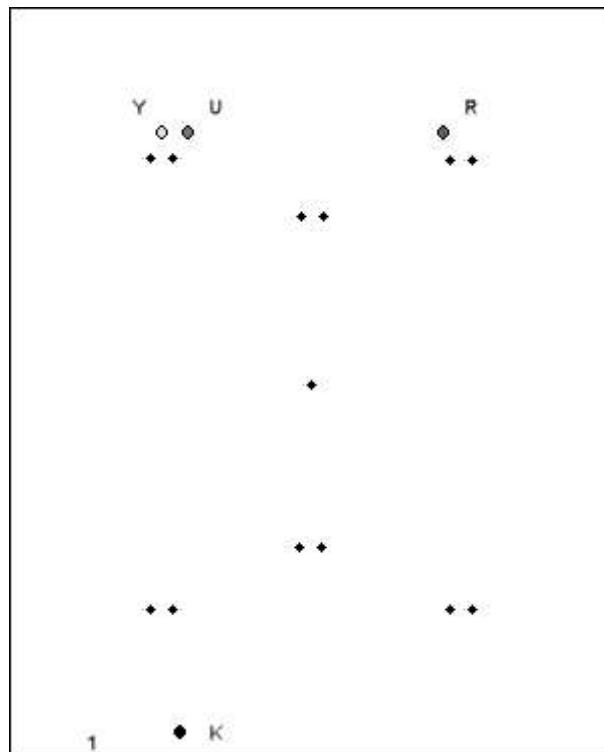


Fig. 1.15 (Y has just run 2)

Perhaps that was a slight overstatement, but the delayed triple was at least “on”. However, I think you will agree that in Fig. 1.15, where you have just run 2, the delayed triple is indeed “there for the taking”. In good playing conditions the best players will usually complete it and on most lawns the not-quite-expert will be able to set it up and travel hopefully.

This is the only occasion on which I shall flatly contradict Cotter (page 83) and Solomon (pages 60-62). Fig 1.15 used to occur often in their day when K had missed the long lift shot from B baulk and Y had previously been peeled through the first hoop. Their continuation was to peel after 3 and to rush U to spot (1). Then with one bound they transposed to the standard triple by sending U to 5 and getting a good rush on K to 4.

To my mind this is a flagrant example of putting the break at risk. Cotter says of the vital split shot: “A really difficult shot. It requires a lot of courage.” If you are good enough to play this sort of croquet you should use your skill to do a nice safe delayed triple. The only sound way of setting up the standard triple when K has missed the long shot and Y is for 2 is to rush U somewhere near spot (1) after making 2. It will not always work, but at least you have the delayed triple to fall back on.

1.II.3 Jawsing after 3: how to continue

You can always rush K back after 4, rush peel R and take off to U at 5. However, that is not always the best way. I deal comprehensively with this problem in connection with the ensuing penult peel (pages 29 to 31).

1.II.4 The 4b peel before 5

In Fig. 1.16 you have just run 3 and find the 4b peel impossible. You can take off to K having set up U and R so accurately that after making 4 you can do the 4b peel and get a dolly rush on U to 5. For a few players this does not put the break at risk. Do not try this peel unless you are one of them.

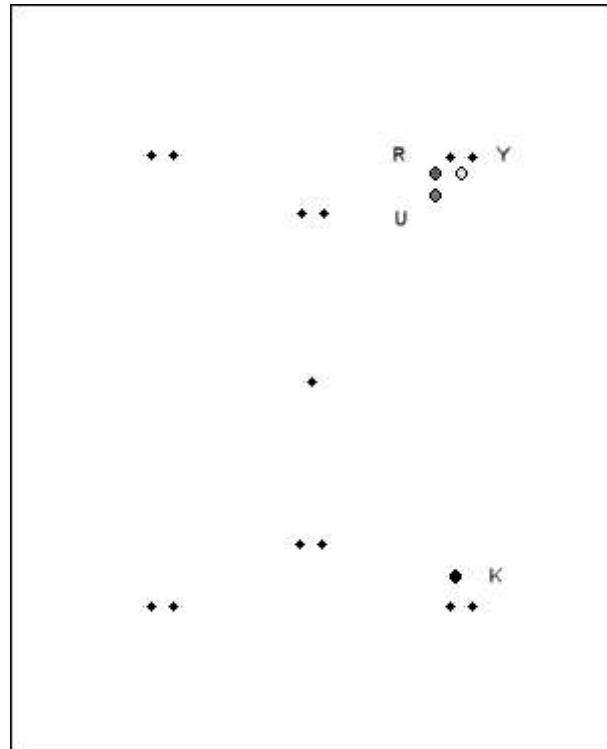


Fig. 1.16 (Y has just run 3)

1.II.5 The 4b peel before 6

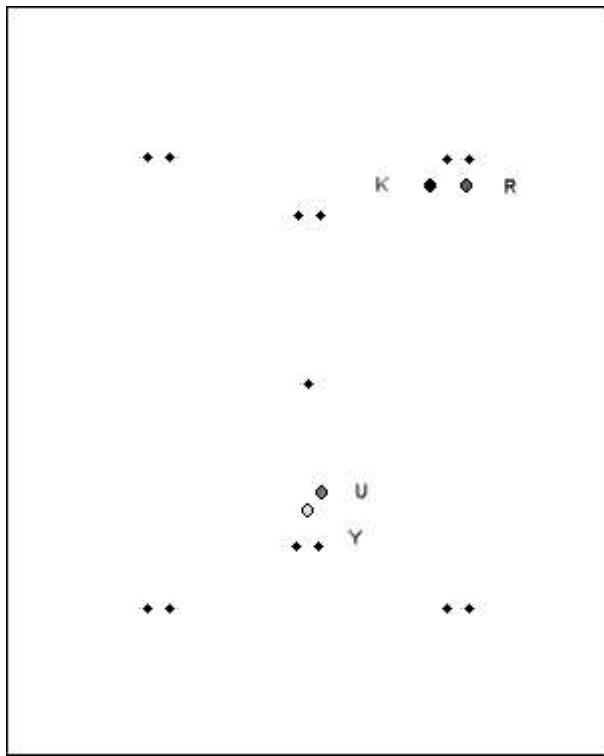


Fig. 1.17 (Y has just run 5)

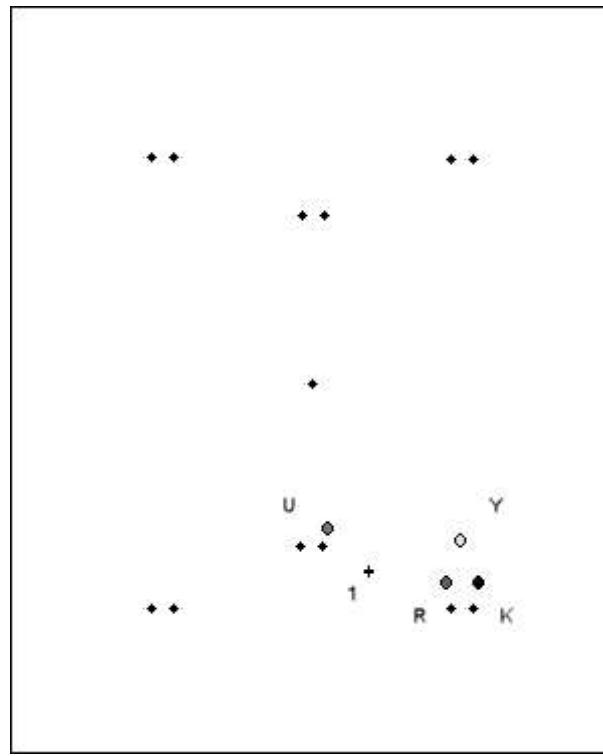


Fig. 1.18 (Y for 4)

Fig. 1.17 shows the ideal position for this peel when you have just run 5. It is the natural sequel to Fig. 1.16 or to a failure to peel after 3. Note that R is to the right of the line of the hoop so that K is well away from the rush line on R. It is essential to have K more or less in position. The position of R is less important, as you still have a rush on it to come. In Fig. 1.18 you have just made 3 and sent U to 5. You have a free choice as to which of R and K to treat as pivot ball and which as pioneer for 4. Use R as the pivot, because then you will position the all-important K from short range and R from about spot (1). (I hope you were not thinking of rushing the pivot ball to 4b and taking off back to U. Do that only when U is well positioned in front of the hoop. Even then most people would prefer to "send" R to 4b than to rush it.) I am not fond of peeling 4b just before making 1b. If you feel the same way you, like me, will make a special effort to get a chance to peel before 6. Peeling

before 6 has two great advantages over the peel before 1b. First, you can more often do a stop shot peel before 6, which allows you to peel from a greater distance and from more of an angle. Second, you can much more easily afford to jaws the peel before 6. Jawsing before 1b usually leads to a straight double peel finish.

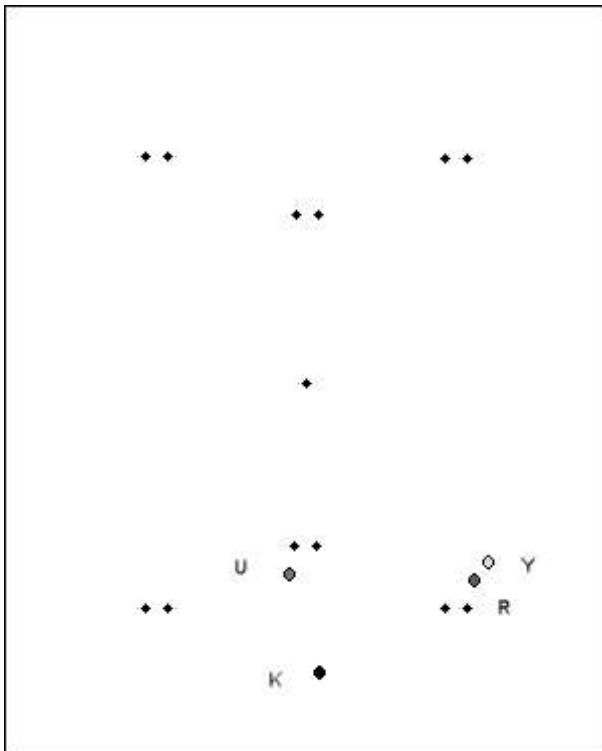


Fig. 1.19 (Y for 4)

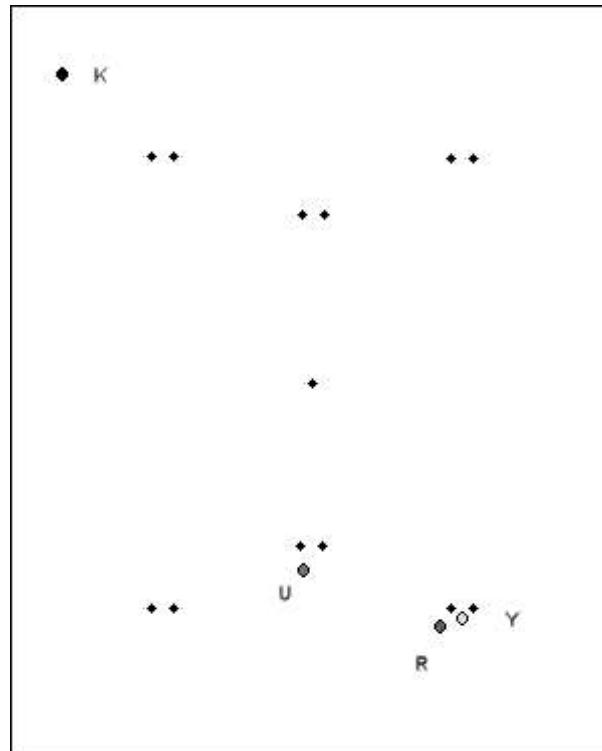


Fig. 1.20 (Y has just run 4)

In Fig. 1.19 it is easy after making 4 to send R to the peg and to set up the peel before 1b with reasonable accuracy. Alternatively you may try to set up the peel before 6, in which case you will have to send both R and K into position from quite a distance. The position may become ragged and, having committed yourself to the peel before 6, you may subsequently be unable to make a fresh attempt before 1b. All the same, I think I should generally go for the peel before 6 in this position.

1.II.6 The 4b peel after 6

This section is devoted specifically to the peel setup by rushing the peeled ball to 4b immediately after you have made 6 ("after 6" as distinct from "before 1b"). I referred on page 8 under letter (c) to a rather speculative attempt to peel 4b immediately after 6. This kind of peel is sometimes your best chance. In Fig. 1.20 you were hoping to rush R to II after making 4, but have been disappointed. You have no serious alternative to sending R to 6. If you can rush U to II after 5, send U to 1b and K to 4b and then you ought to get a sporting shot at the peel.

If you feel that the 7-yard rush into peeling position which that entails is too steep you can consider another way of setting up the peel. Make instead for Fig. 1.21 in which you are about to approach 6 off R with a stop shot sending R towards 4b. After the hoop you rush K to the boundary and send it to 2b, hoping for a rush on R to a peeling position. Some punters prefer this method.

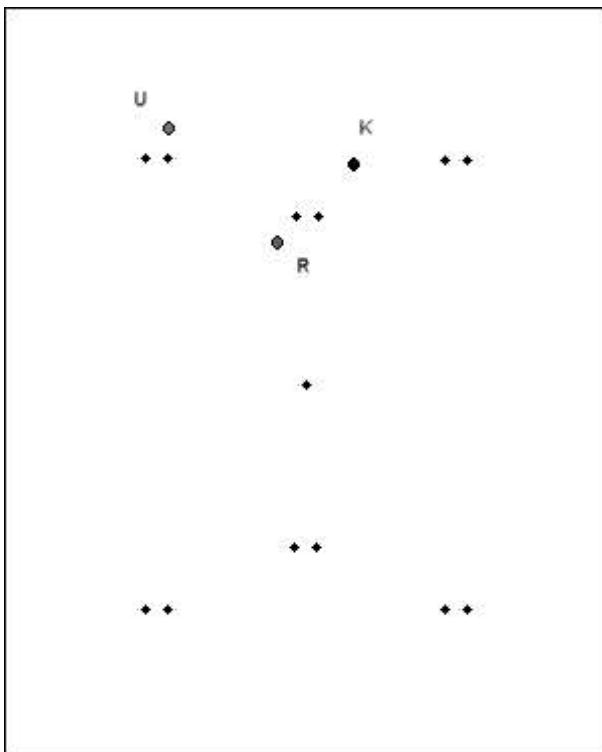


Fig. 1.21 (Y for 6, croqueting R)

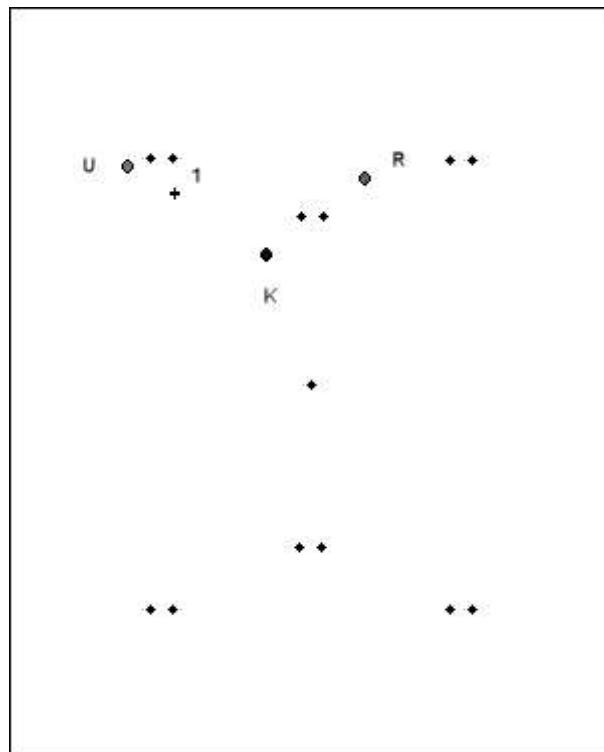


Fig. 1.22 (Y for 6, croqueting R)

In Fig. 1.22 you have made 5 off R and mishit the rush on it. Leave R, tidy up U, approach 6 off K with a little stop shot, make 6, rush R to 4b and peel going to K. With U near spot (1) you do not need to rush on K and can do a stop shot peel of R. (This point calls for a little thought: K may lie well to the South West of 4b, so you may roquet it almost to 6 after the peel. With U a little on the non-playing side of 1b you can still send K to 2b.)

1.II.7 Jawsing before 6: how to continue

In Fig. 1.23, after making 6 off K you should rush it off near spot (1) unless you are very poor at the stop shot. That is much better than rushing it to III because (a) you send it to 2b from shorter range; (b) there is no furniture between spot (1) and 2b; and (c) there is no risk of ending up on the wrong side of 4b. Having rush peeled R you can try the penult peel after 1b.

Always remember that the rush on K after 6 is not essential and may fail. Do not break down trying for it. You can take off from K to R, rush peel R and send it to 2b. Anticipate this by placing U well to the playing side of 1b (as in the diagram) if you are confident of at least jawsing R before 6, so as to make the split shot easier if you do only jaws it.

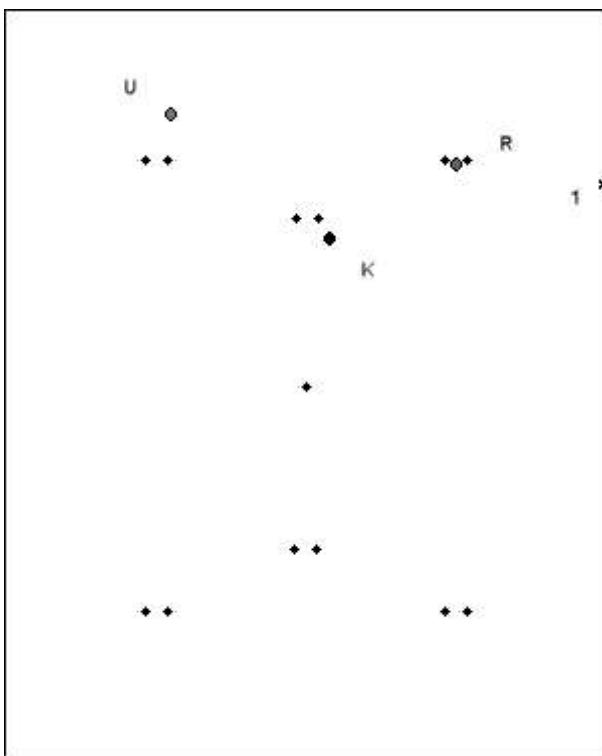


Fig. 1.23 (Y for 6, croqueting K)

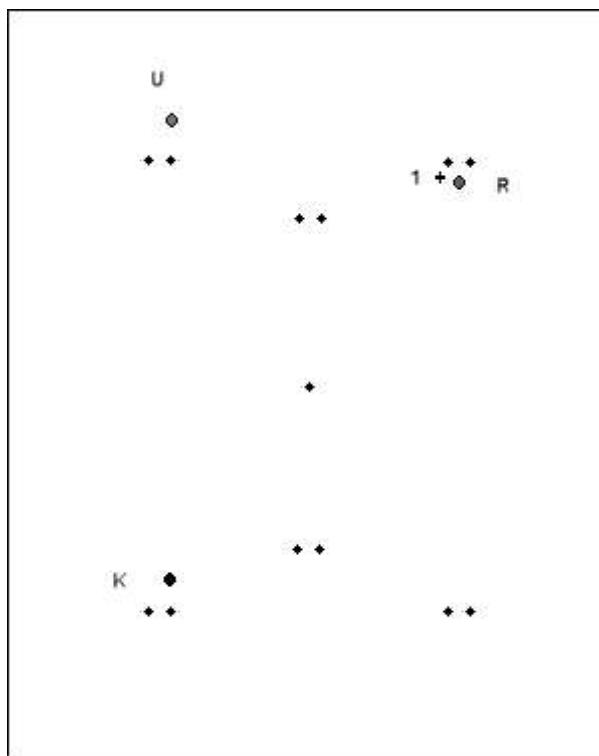


Fig. 1.24 (Y for 1b, croqueting R)

Rush peeling R and sending it to 2b can also be the safest way of continuing after R has only just failed to complete the running of 4b. The small target which it presents on the playing side of 4b can cause problems if approached from the boundary.

1.II.8 The 4b peel before 1b

Fig. 1.24 shows the principal position just before this peel. You should take great care over the position of U. I recommend a position 2 yards North and a little to the East of 1b, as shown. Alternatively you could put U at spot (1), rather as you would when peeling before 6. The ensuing 13-yard rush is not to my taste, but it may suit yours. Cotter liked it (page 86).

There is not a great deal to be said about this peel. Its preparation and execution call more for the exercise of judgment than for theoretical technique. Since it affords the last really good chance of peeling before you get to 4b it often tempts you into indiscretion. I must plead guilty to having often peeled with U at such positions as spot (2), when I really ought to have concentrated on keeping control of the break. You have to strike a balance between competing arguments. If you are playing well and your opponent is at least as strong as you, the need to go out in the turn may outweigh what you feel to be only a slight risk of breaking down. If you are in any doubt, play safe.

Perhaps the deciding factor when you consider whether to try a risky peel before 1b is the likelihood of the peel succeeding. If it succeeds but you fail to make 1b, you can win without conceding any more lifts. If the peel fails you may end up for 1b and 4b, an awkward clip position which often proves to be two lifts away from a win.

This particular peel almost inevitably involves giving the peeled ball a good deal of clockwise spin, which helps a peel coming from slightly to the left of the line of the hoop (the spin accelerating the ball off the right-hand wire) but hinders a peel coming from the other side (for the converse reason). To make the most of this you should aim to rush R into a target area whose centre is a little to the left of the line of 4b, and you should have U waiting for you correspondingly slightly away from 1b. This is why I recommend a escape ball 2 yards from 1b. Solomon suggests putting U only one yard from 1b, but that is appropriate only when you already have R so close in front of 4b that you are pretty certain of peeling from perfect position.

A common position leading up to Fig. 1.24 is the one identical to Fig. 1.23 except that R is not in the jaws of 4b but somewhere in front of it. As before, I recommend rushing K to spot (1) in Fig. 1.23 and not to III. Just make sure not to aim the rush of K too near to R.

1.II.9 Jawsing before 1b: how to continue

Fig. 1.25 depicts a tidier-than-usual position after the jawsing; yet even in this position it does not really pay you to fuss around R trying to get the penult peel done before you yourself get to penult. In trying to do so you give yourself too many long strokes that may be inaccurate: positioning the 3b pioneer from over 20 yards, the nearly 30-yard take-off to K, the rush back after 2b and the 20-yard take-off to the 3b pioneer. Yes, I know that these should be well within your capabilities, but a string of them in succession takes its toll; and you have to do them well to get a decent chance to try the peel before 4b.

It is far better to leave R alone until you have made 3b. Concentrate on a tidy 3-ball break: and send K down to spot (1) before 3b. After making 3b, rush peel R and send it accurately to penult. You usually do not have to rely on a forward rush after 3b: take off from U to R and a decent rush on K after 4b will enable you to pick up U and set up a straight double peel.

The extent to which you need a forward rush after 3b depends on how far R is through 4b. If it is nearly completely through, it presents rather a small target and you will not want to take off to it from 20 yards away. Quite a good way of coping with this problem when the 3b pioneer is poorly placed is to do a drive or stop shot approach sending U well down the court. You may not get a forward rush after the hoop but you will probably at least get a forward roquet, which will be good enough.

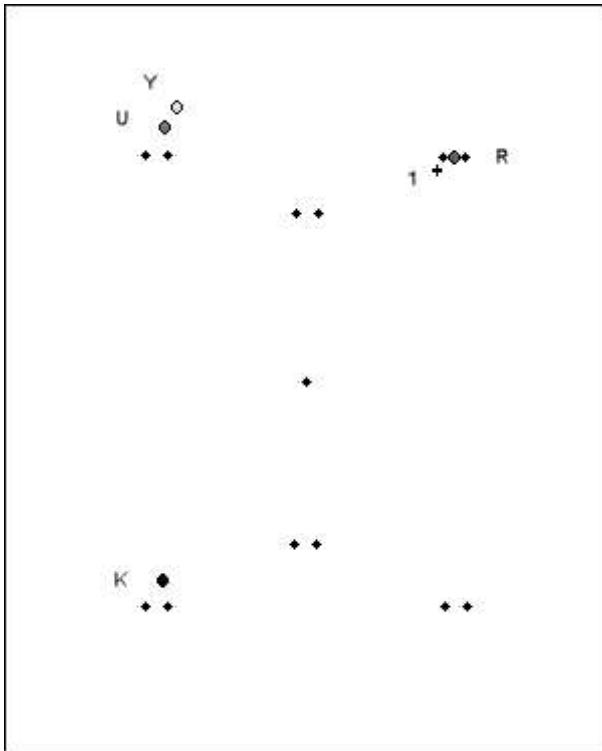


Fig. 1.25 (Y for 1b)

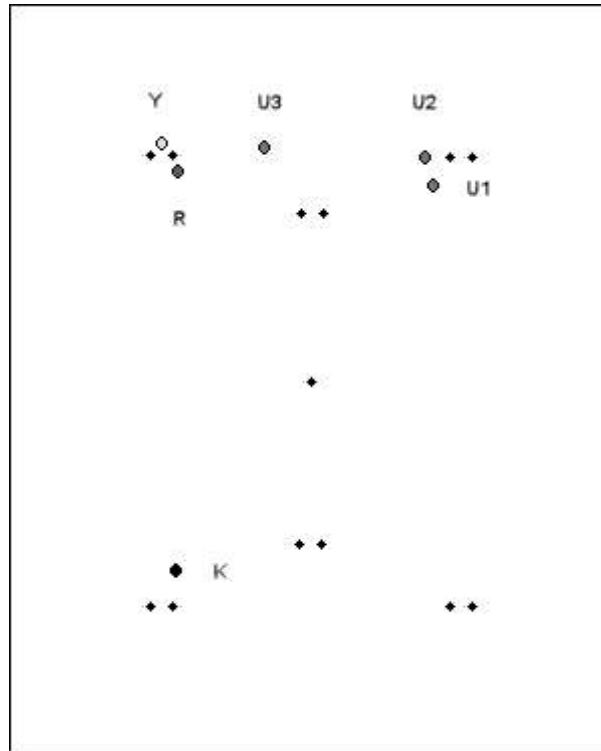


Fig. 1.26 (Y for 1b)

1.II.10 Peeling 4b after 1b

Fig. 1.26 shows the position when you are about to run 1b and can then rush R to 4b and peel it. U₁ and U₂ are the best places to have U, but often enough you will have to put up with ragged places like U₃. Looking at Fig. 1.26, even the legendary Mrs Guggenheim can see (a) that there is a peel to be had if the rush is good enough and (b) that it is worth having a go at it, however slight the chance of success, because there is no better way of doing the triple. Yet strangely this manoeuvre is outside the regular repertoire of most of our leading players, not because they are less perceptive than Mrs Guggenheim but because on the occasions when they could set it up they fail to recognise that it is just round the corner.

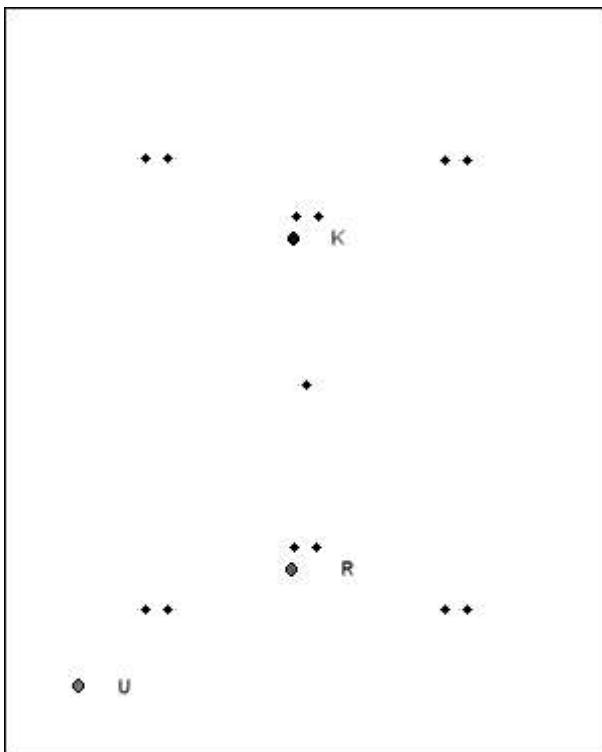


Fig. 1.27 (Y for 5, croqueting R)

Here are two typical positions leading up to the peel after 1b. In Fig. 1.27 you are still picking up the break and are about to approach 5 off R. R goes to 1b, you make 6 off K, rush K to I, send K to 2b, rush U down and send it to 4b. Notice the temptation (to all but the enlightened) to rush R to I after 5.

In Fig. 1.28 you have had the break for some time but the 4b peel has eluded you. You completely missed 4b when trying the peel before 6 and you are now about to approach 6 off K. After making the hoop, rush K to the North boundary and send it to 2b. You cannot in the same stroke get behind R, so just roquet it and roll it to spot (1), rush U to spot (2) and approach 1b with a little stop shot to reach Fig. 1.26 with U at U_3 and R a little less accurately placed. To get the peel you need a good roll to spot (1) followed by a good rush to 4b: not at all easy, but there is nothing better to do.

In a sense those two examples represent two extremes. In the first, you had a completely controlled break and you could set up the peel with considerable accuracy at no risk. In the second, you would deliberately risk letting the break become slightly ragged in order to get a speculative peel attempt in circumstances where there was much to be said for sending K to the peg and R to 2b, keeping complete control of the break and pinning your hopes on the straight triple. When I said just now that there was "nothing better to do" than the peel attempt, I should perhaps have applied that comment only to a good player who was playing well. No one could be criticised for playing safe in the Fig. 1.28 position.

However, you can be criticised for failing to make the attempt in Fig. 1.29. After making 5 you have sent U much too far past 1b and have failed to rush R in front of 4b. The poor position of U effectively rules out both the peel after 6 and the peel before 1b.

Send R towards 1b, make 6 off K, send K to 2b and you can easily set up the Fig. 1.26 position with considerable accuracy. One too often sees spineless play in positions like Fig. 1.29: either R goes to the peg as a mere pivot ball or it fusses busily round 4b without ever looking like doing anything.

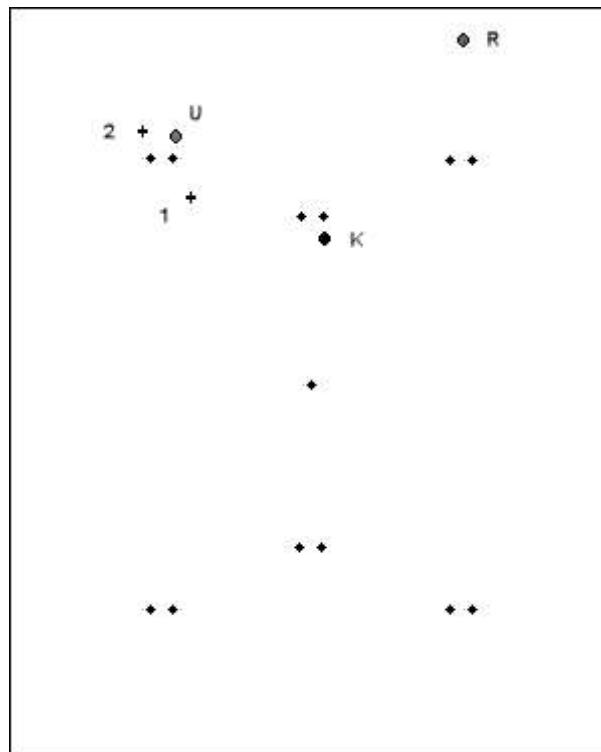


Fig. 1.28 (Y for 6, croqueting K)

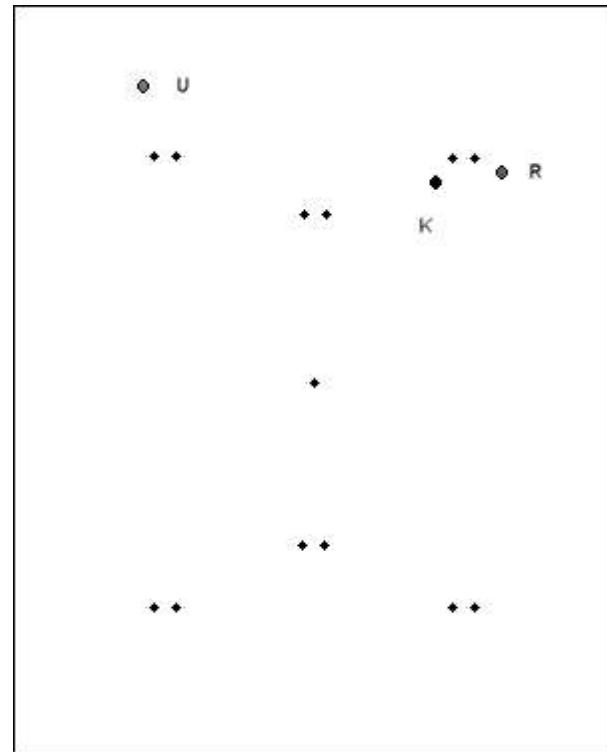


Fig. 1.29 (Y for 6, croqueting R)

1.II.11 Peeling 4b before 2b or 3b

If you make 2b off R you will occasionally succeed in rushing it to 4b and peeling it immediately. Failing that, you should set up for a straight triple. Peeling 4b before 2b or 3b with your pioneer escape ball down at 4b should be reserved for friendly games. (For a different opinion, see Cotter at Page 86.)

Part III: The Penult Peel

1.III.1 The penult peel after 6 or before 1b

It is natural enough to start setting up this peel by getting a rush back to III after making 4 (Fig. 1.30). Unless I have total mastery of K at 4, I prefer to approach 4 sending K not to the left of 4 (as shown) but to its right and to set up a rush to spot (1). This avoids the risk of rushing K off at spot (2). After an inaccurate rush on the West side of 4 you can simply take off to behind R. K will be ahead of your break and easy to pick up after 5. If your rush after 4 looks at all long do not try to hit it to the boundary. A measured roquet to somewhere near the peg is quite good enough.

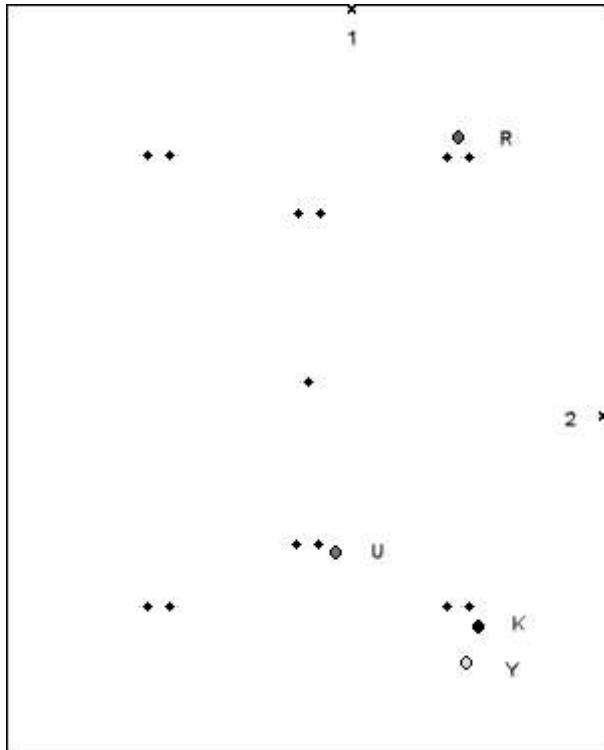


Fig. 1.30 (Y has just run 4)

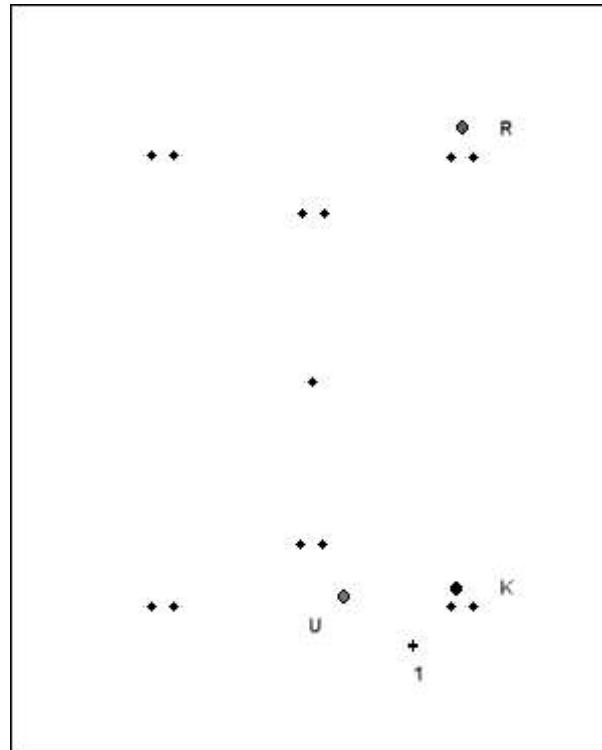


Fig. 1.31 (Y for 4, croqueting K)

If you have successfully peeled through 4b after 3 and have got tolerable pioneers at 4 and 5 you can hardly go wrong. Just remember not to press too hard. You do not *need* a backward rush after 4, so if your pioneer there is indifferent you should concentrate on making the hoop. You do not *have* to send R to 6 before making 5, so if your pioneer at 5 is poorly placed you can, and often should, use R as a pivot ball to help you out.

In Fig. 1.31, where you have just mispositioned U and roqueted K, you have two plausible courses of action: (a) you can rush K back to the North boundary after 4, in which case R may end up hovering around the centre of the court; or (b) you can leave R alone and concentrate on getting an accurate rush on K to spot (1) so as to ensure control at 5 and 6. I slightly prefer the former method, because after making 5 you will have all four balls somewhere near the centre of the court and even if none of them is particularly near to 6 you will usually be able to construct a penult peel after 6. If you use the latter method you virtually have to get a good rush to III after 5. As a general principle you should if possible avoid a plan which involves a compulsory forward rush after a hoop unless the pioneer is perfectly placed.

What I have said so far about the penult peel is important. This is the sort of quiet play that will make the spectators say of you "Oh, he makes it all look so easy!" Of course you do: you *make* it easy.

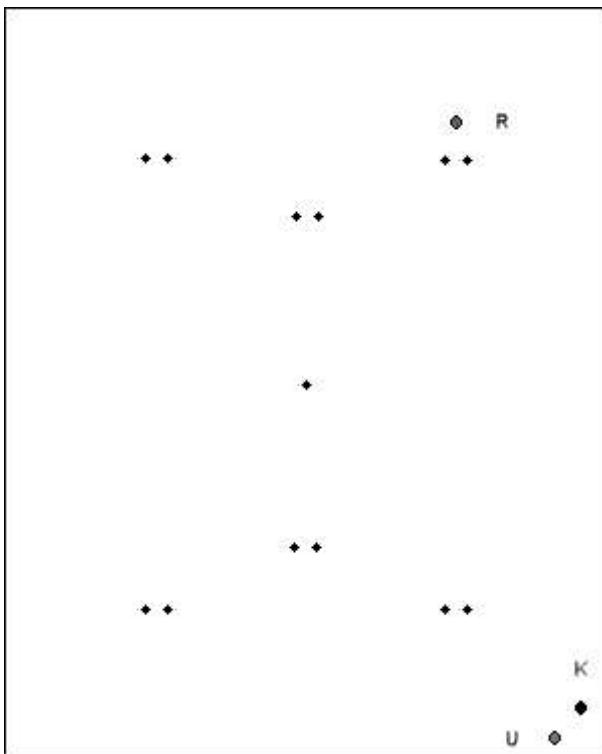


Fig. 1.32 (Y for 4, croqueting U)

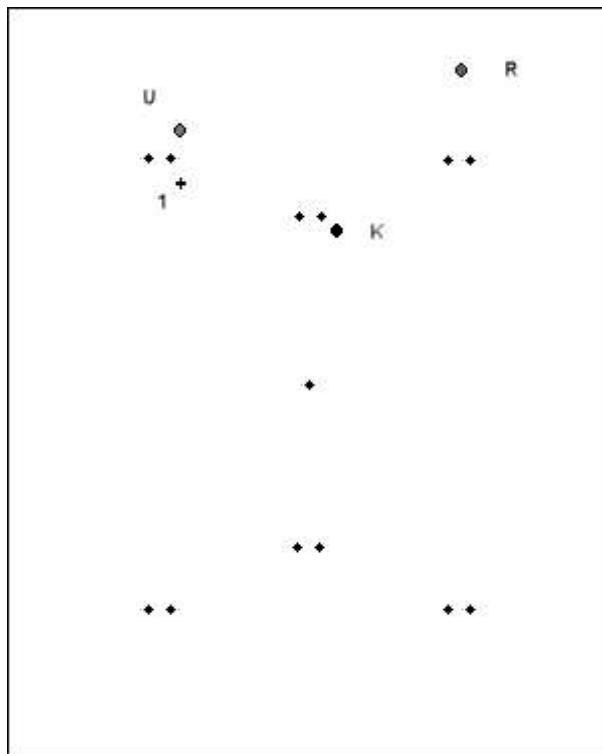


Fig. 1.33 (Y for 6, croqueting R)

In Fig. 1.32 you have not been entirely successful in getting the fourth ball into play, but have made the 4b peel after 3 all the same and have unluckily rushed U to rather an awkward spot. I shall not go into the various ways of picking up the break from here, but I do advise you to concentrate on the break and to forget peels for the time being. Make 5 off R if it suits you or leave it behind your break. Do not choose an inferior line of play merely because it brings R to penult when you are for 6 or 1b.

For various reasons you may have difficulty in getting the peeled ball from 4b to penult in time to continue the standard triple, and sometimes you find yourself trying to roll the peeled ball in front of penult from 10 yards away as in Fig. 1.33. This roll is clearly unreliable, though you may be able to cannon an errant R into peeling position with K. A plausible alternative continuation after Fig. 1.33 is to roquet K after making 6, to send K to 2b, to rush R to an angled peeling position and to peel with a thick take-off going to U. This is made easier if U is somewhere around spot (1).

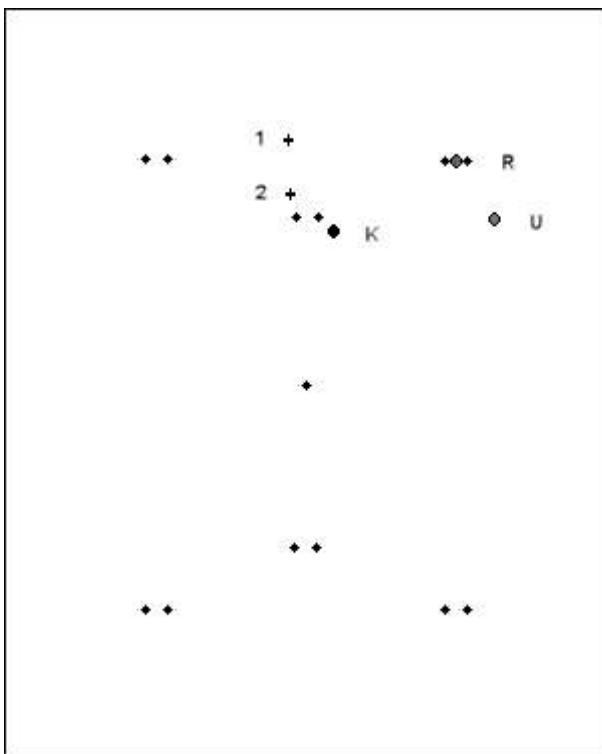


Fig. 1.34 (Y for 6, croqueting U)

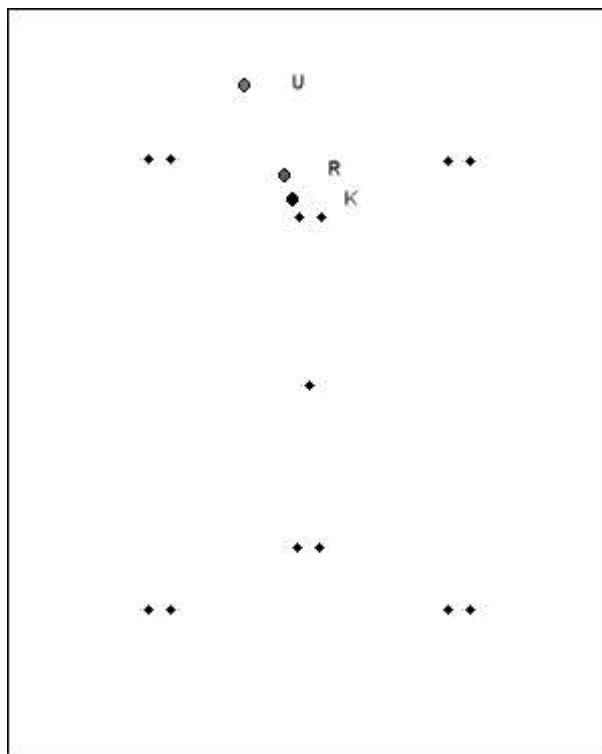


Fig. 1.35 (Y for 1b, croqueting U)

Sometimes you will have no serious alternative to those methods but usually you will have had a previous position something like that shown in Fig. 1.34, with Y taking croquet from U. Rather than sending U to 1b, a more reliable way of getting the peel after 6 is this: send U to spot (1), roquet R, send R to penult (preferably not straight in front of it) and approach 6 sending K to spot (2). You run 6 and rush U to an appropriate spot clear of the furniture, as in Fig. 1.35. Now perform the simple manoeuvre of sending U to 2b, rushing R in front of penult, peeling R and getting a dolly rush on K to 1b. Note that it is slightly more satisfactory to have R to the West of penult than to the East, because then you have an easier time manoeuvring U after making 6: K is an easily avoided obstacle and you will generally place U more accurately at 2b from that side of penult. However, since U gets positioned before R your best course of action is to put R the same side of the hoop as U, whichever that may be. You will see that in Fig. 1.34 spot (1) is slightly to the West of the line of the hoop.

There are two snags to this method. First, you may roll R right in front of penult so that, having failed to dislodge it with K, you roquet it when making 6. It is in anticipation of this that you will have sent U to spot (1) and not further North. Now you can peel R, turn round and roquet U (as in Fig. 1.36), send U to 2b and make 1b off K. To be frank, I do not like that position. You may fail to get a decent rush on K and so break down. An alternative plan is to roquet U gently and to send it in the general direction of 2b (not necessarily all the way) making sure of your rush on K and expecting later to get a dolly rush on U to 2b; but neither plan entirely avoids the risk of breaking down.

The other snag is that you rely on rushing K to 1b from 8 yards away. For many readers this will be a risk in name only, but it is important to appreciate that you should not use this method if it really is risky for you. I need hardly say that when you execute the peeling stroke you should put all your concentration into getting the dolly rush on K. Let the peel take care of itself.

Despite these snags, I myself nearly always use this method. It is not particularly difficult to roll R to a position deliberately off the line of the hoop. You can afford to have R two yards wide without seriously jeopardising the peel.

In particular, I regard this as the best method of continuing the triple on those occasions when both the 4b peel sticks and the pioneer at 5 is poorly placed. It is wrong in those circumstances to go to the peeled ball after making 4 in the hope that after the rush peel your long take-off will get you a decent rush to 5.

This, then, is my solution to Problem 1.2. (For those readers who are unhappy about the 8-yard rush to 1b, the solution will be to make for a Fig. 1.33 position.)

You can use this method in other situations where you are unable to rush the peeled ball to 6 and have to send it to penult from long range. Problem 1.3 (discussed on page 10) was nearly an example of this. In Fig. 1.37 you are approaching 5 off R, which is for penult. Rush R off near U after making 5 and send R to penult. (Do not waste control trying for the fatuous rush on U.) If R goes to a peeling position you have a standard double peel. If not, send U below penult on the same side as R (e.g. spot (1) in Fig. 1.34).

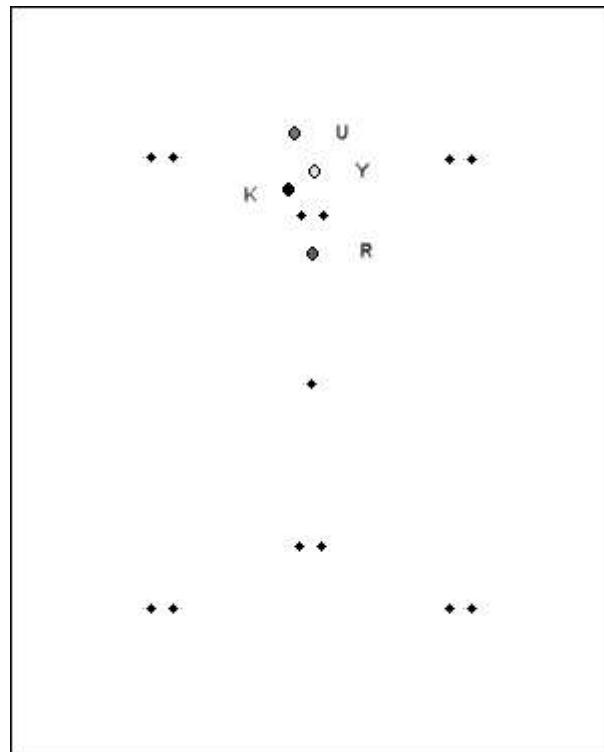


Fig. 1.36 (Yfor 1b, about to roquet U)

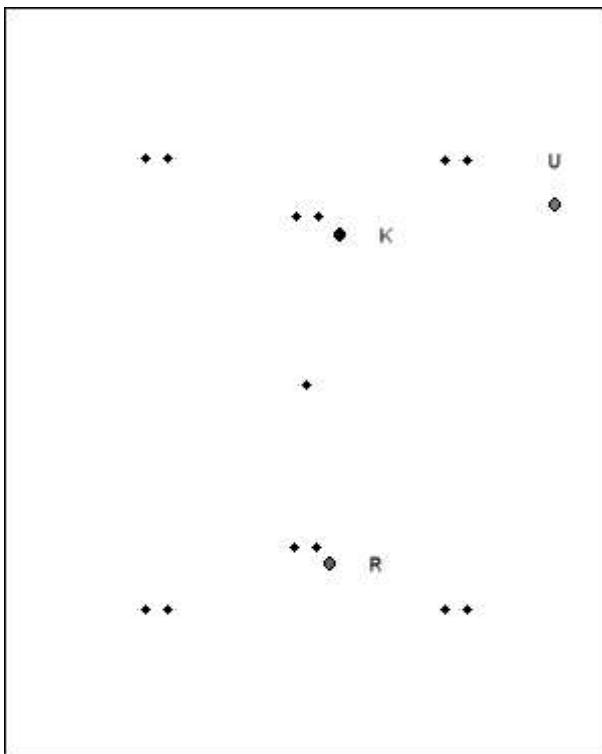


Fig. 1.37 (Y for 5, croqueting R)

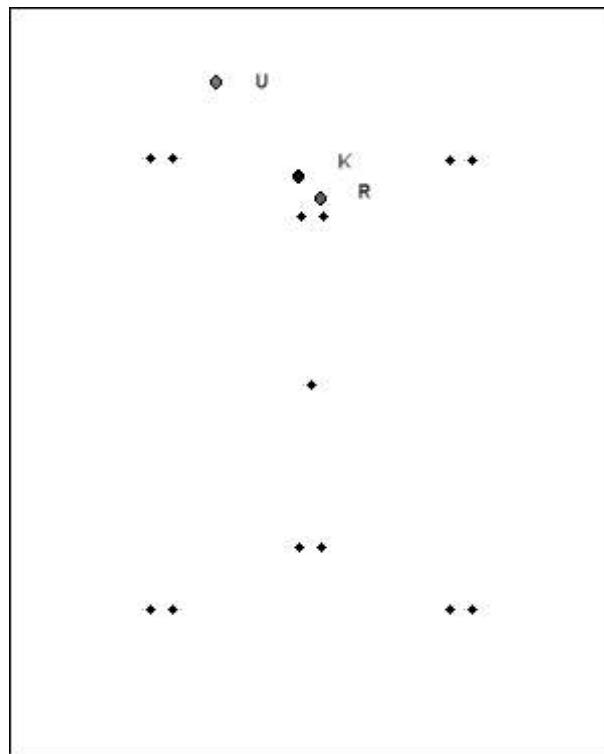


Fig. 1.38 (Y for 1b, croqueting R)

Always remember when peeling through penult after 6 that one of the best places to put the peeled ball is actually in the jaws. You should consider doing this deliberately, even though you think you could make a complete peel, if you can foresee that your 2b pioneer may be poorly placed because then you may need to be able to rush R up the lawn after making 1b. I give an example of this in Fig. 1.38, where you have just run 6 and roqueted R.

1.III.2 Jawsing (or not quite jawsing) the penult peel before 1b: how to continue

If R is genuinely jawsed, it usually pays you to rush peel it after 1b. Your best chance of an early rover peel may be to use R as your pioneer for 3b. (See page 45.)

If R is on the wire and cannot be rush peeled, be very careful. This is a notorious trap. It will often pay you to leave R alone until after 2b and perhaps even until after 3b. If R is only just through the hoop the same need for caution arises.

Quite a good idea in situations like this is to rush your pioneer to 1b and to see where it ends up. Then you go for the forward rush to near 2b if it is reasonable to do so, falling back on the visit to R as a pivot if the forward rush is at all tricky.

1.III.3 The penult peel after 1b

In Fig. 1.39 you have just run 1b and now rush R to penult and peel it. This sort of position commonly arises when you have been forced to use R as pioneer for 1b. One of the solutions to Problem 1.3 was an example of this.

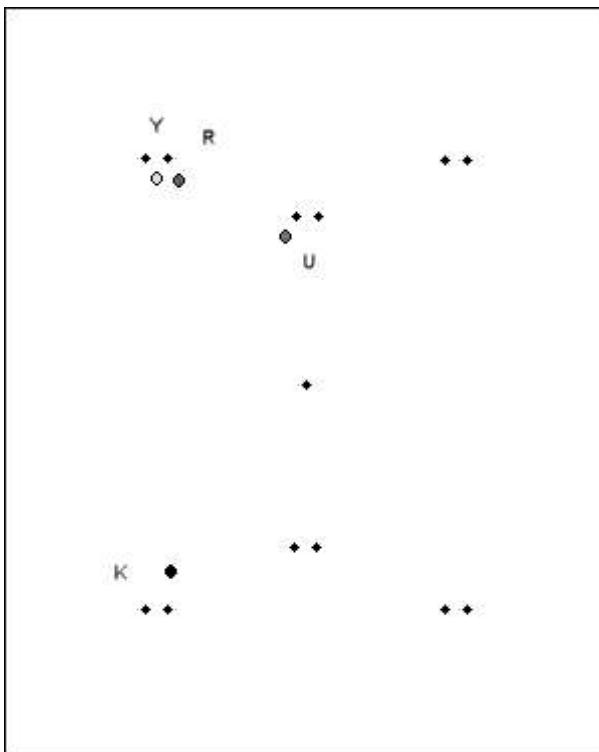


Fig. 1.39 (Y has just run 1b)

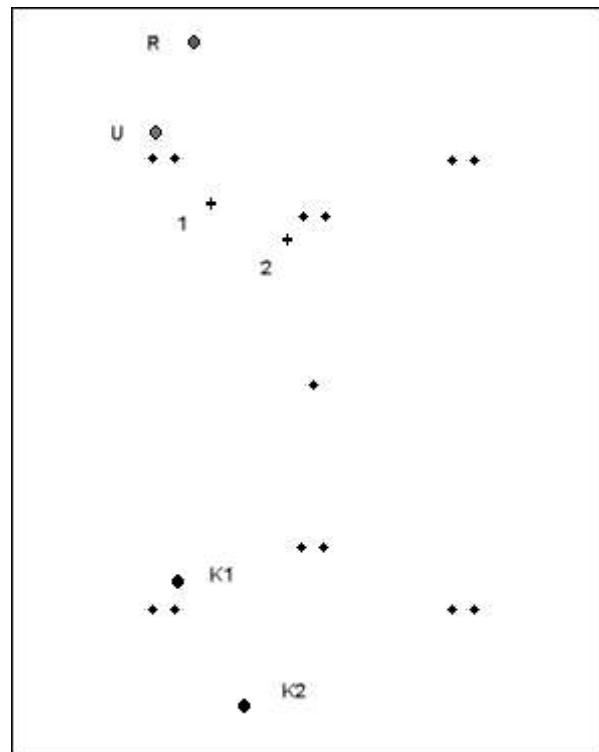


Fig. 1.40 (Y for 1b, croqueting R)

In Fig. 1.40 you are for 1b and are taking croquet from R. If K is at K₁, you obviously send R to penult for the peel before 2b unless you have an aversion from that roll. But if K is at K₂ you cannot afford to risk the roll peel before 2b. In that case you should send R to spot (1) and do a stop shot approach sending U as far in the direction of spot (2) as is safe. That hoop approach will often not send U as far as penult, so that in order to be able to rush U down to K after the penult peel you will have to rush R well North of penult after making 1b. (Incidentally, that “rush” on R often turns out to be more of a “roquet” when you have had to roll R inaccurately from 4b to 1b.)

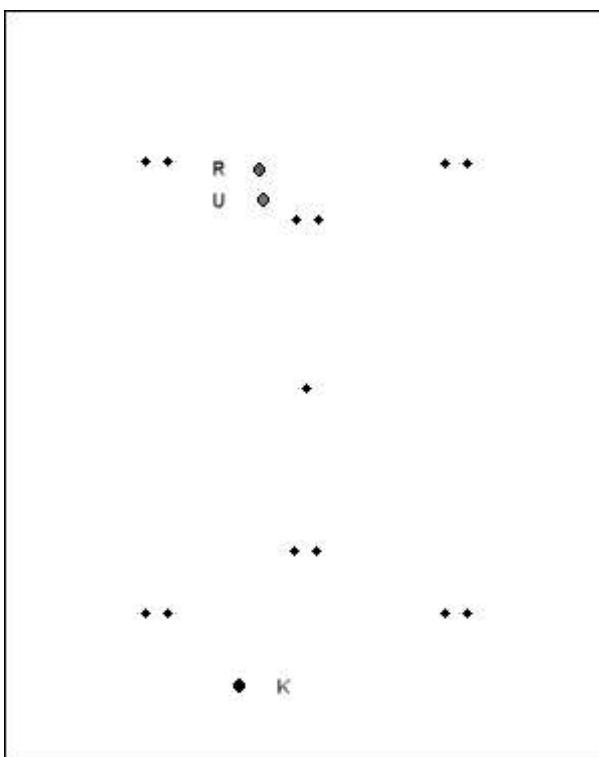


Fig. 1.41 (Y for 2b, croqueting R)

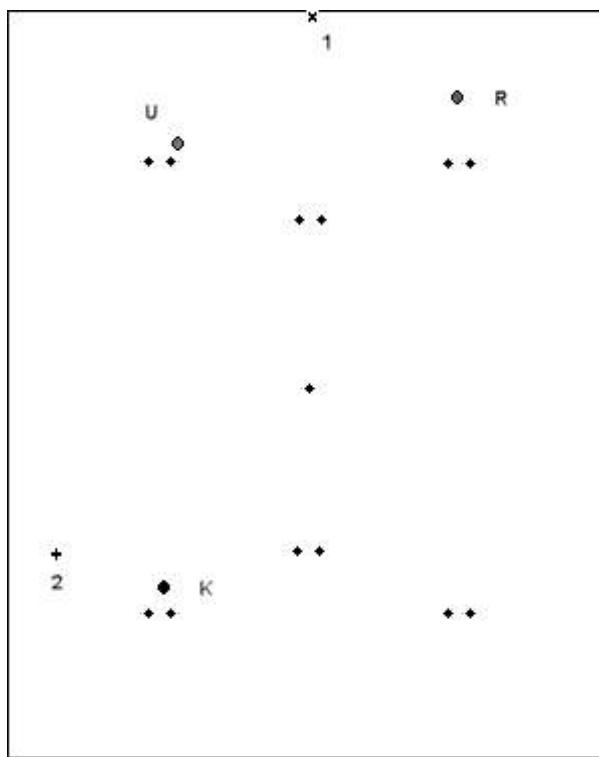


Fig. 1.42 (Y for 1b, croqueting U)

All this has the result that the peeling position can often look something like Fig. 1.41. That may look a little ragged, but in fact everything is under control. Do not spurn this kind of peel attempt. It wins matches.

1.III.4 Continuation after doing the 4b peel before 1b

Fig. 1.42 shows a familiar position where you are about to make 1b off U with one peel in the bag. R is 3 yards beyond the hoop. If K were poorly placed, you would (I hope) have no difficulty in finding the correct line, which is to leave R alone until after 2b unless you fail to get a forward rush. With K in perfect position it is not so obvious that you should still leave R alone, but you should. If after 1b you rush U to spot (1) or to III you leave yourself a difficult split shot. The 3b pioneer may be well off target and you are by no means certain to get any useful rush on R. It is better to rush U to spot (2). You ought then to have no trouble in placing U accurately at 3b and making 2b with enough control to rush K down behind R afterwards.

If you follow my advice you ought virtually always to get a good peel attempt before 4b. If you do not follow it, I warrant that you will break down as often as you get a decent peel attempt before 3b and you will often lose even the chance to peel before 4b. It just does not pay to rush U to spot (1).

Where R has been peeled through 4b by only a yard or so the choice is not so clearcut, the rush to III then being more attractive: see Fig. 1.43. All the same, going to R after 1b can be counterproductive. If you now croquet U to spot (1) or spot (2) by mistake it will be almost impossible to have both R and K at penult when you make 3b. Do not let the extremeness of the error which I have posited mislead you into thinking this an academic point. Spot (1) is only 3 yards too long - 10% of the distance travelled from the North yard-line and therefore quite a common error - yet even with U there you will hardly want to take off to it from near penult. Spot (2) involves a 15% error. Such mistakes occasionally happen. They become unacceptable when U is sent to 3b from the North, but you can usually cope with them when U is sent from near 2b (spot (2) in Fig. 1.42). Fig. 1.42 showed U and K neatly set by their respective hoops. Real life is not like that. In the wake of the 4b peel before 1b the break can get pretty ragged. Besides, doing the peel that late is often a sign of "previous misplay" with the promise of more to come. Do not let the possibility of completing the triple after 1b go to your head. If things are not going well, put your pride in your pocket. Rush U to R, send U to 4b or the peg, rush R and use it as your 3b pioneer. Now with a minimum of fuss you have regained complete control of the break and can set up a well prepared straight double peel.

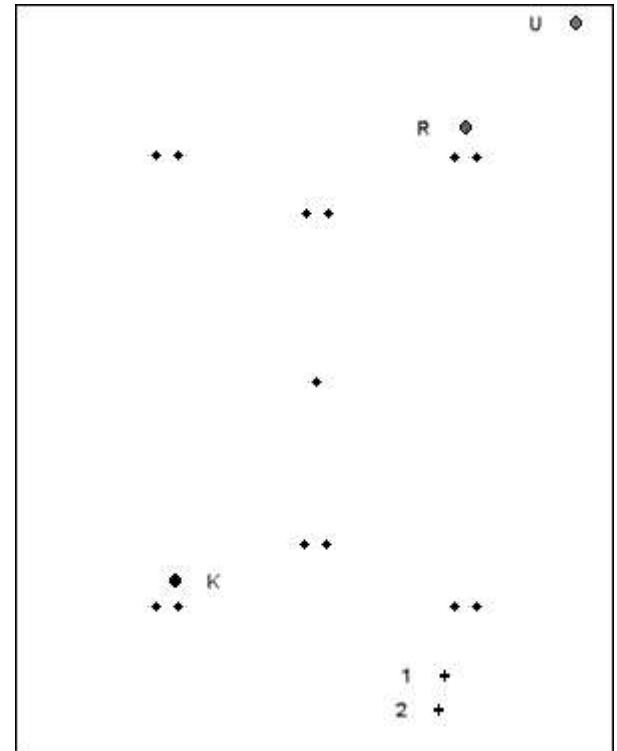


Fig. 1.43 (Y for 2b, croqueting U)

1.III.5 The penult peel before 2b or 3b

Fig. 1.44 shows the typical position for the peel before 2b. The peel before 3b is similar, with K at 4b instead of 2b. Often these positions come naturally, both opponent balls being pioneers and the partner ball the pivot. Just remember to avoid rushing R to a spot wired from your pioneer and to be very sensible when assessing the adequacy of the pioneer. I like to execute the peel with as extreme a pass roll as possible, though some people prefer to send the peeled ball well up the lawn if they can.

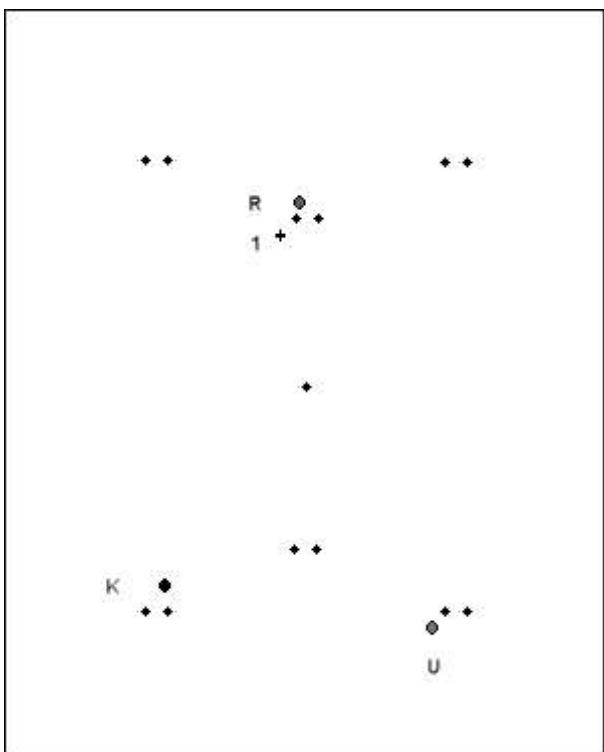


Fig. 1.44 (Y for 2b, croqueting R)

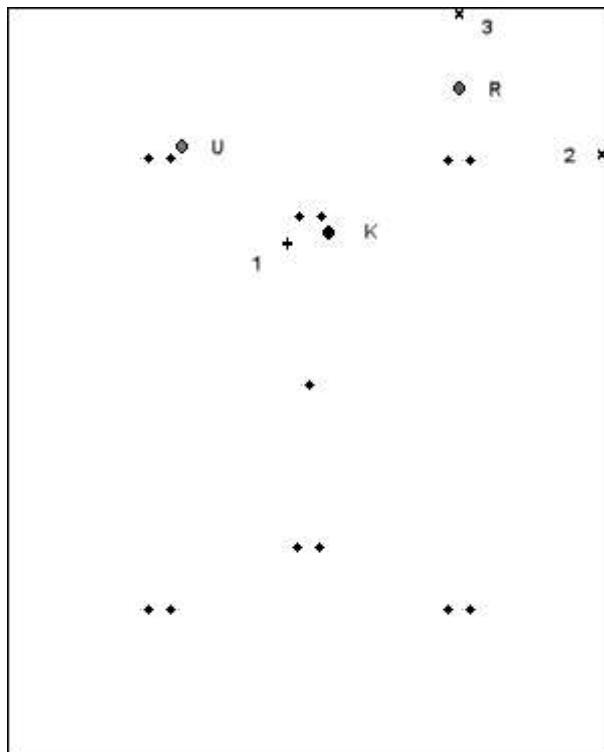


Fig. 1.45 (Y for 6, croqueting K)

Fig. 1.45 shows the position when you are about to approach 6 off K having just sent the 4b peel rather too far through. If you rush K to III after the hoop you are very unlikely to be able both to send K to 2b and to get a rush on R. The rush is a quite unnecessary luxury, because with U well placed at 1b you can afford to send R to penult with a split roll. Bearing in mind the importance of the 2b pioneer, it is better to rush K not to III, from where the peg impedes its progress to 2b, but to spot (3). Forget the rush on R. You may find spot (2) a more congenial place to which to rush K.

An alternative position for the escape ball when you peel before 2b is shown as spot (1) in Figs. 1.44 and 1.45. I do not recommend this 19-yard rush unless you can make it a dolly rush. Fig. 1.45 is an example of when this version of the peel is particularly appropriate. While you might have difficulty in getting a good pioneer at 2b, you will have no trouble in making 6 and rushing K to spot (1). Then you take off to behind R, rush it (again, not an important rush) and send it to penult.

This method is unfashionable at present, but it is worth noting that it is the method recommended by Cotter (page 83). It particularly suits players of precision croquet: all short, accurate strokes and none of those rustic rolls. Note that after Fig. 1.45 there is a third method of peeling: if you position your 2b pioneer poorly you can revert to the peel after 1b.

Whether to attempt these peels is often simply a matter of experience. In Fig. 1.46 you have made 2b and rushed and croqueted K. Do you try the peel now? If it fails, your roll may not give you a rush on U and its slightly imperfect position may deny you a forward rush after 3b. In other words, the attempt at the peel before 3b might rule out the peel before 4b.

I myself should always take off to U in that position, because I am totally confident of going out when R, K and U are properly placed and regard the peel before 3b as a sign of insecurity. No doubt I should feel differently if I were better at the roll stroke.

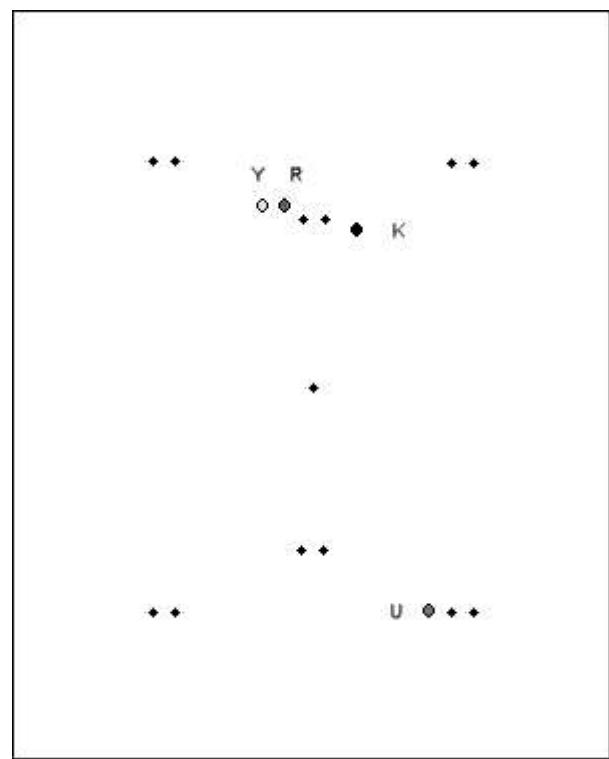


Fig. 1.46 (Y for 3b, about to roquet R)

1.III.6 The penult peel before 4b, and how to continue after jawsing

I hope that you will soon acquire that confidence if you do not already have it. Fig. 1.47 shows the position when you have just roqueted R and are about to peel it and make 4b off K. If the position is accurately set up it is really very easy to go out from it. K_1 and K_2 are 2 or 3 feet from the line of penult. Some players like to have K at K_3 it is nearer to 4b so that you do

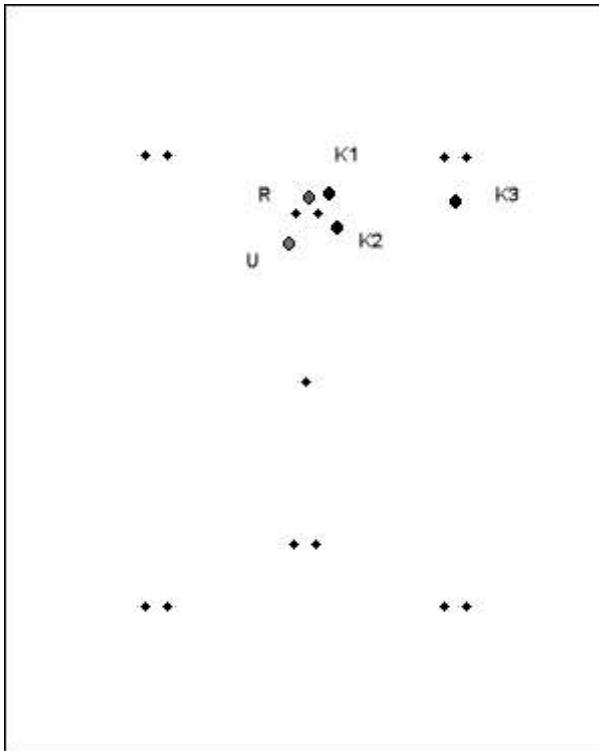


Fig. 1.47 (Y for 4b, croqueting R)

penult. (Again, note the careful placing of U in Fig. 1.47)

When the peeled ball ends up in the jaws I generally prefer the Irish peel to the rush peel especially if, as so often happens, U is not ideally placed. You avoid the danger of roqueting R through the hoop by roqueting U first and leaving yourself such a tiny roquet on R that you cannot go wrong. If necessary you can roquet R from the non-playing side of penult. Roqueting U first has the further advantage of your sending K to rover from short range. Setting up the perfect Fig. 1.47 position is not always easy. If you have all four balls in play you can in the last analysis stop-shot R and K down to penult from beyond 3b, as in Problem 1.4 (discussed on page 7), but then your attempt at the peel may be rather ragged.

The key to setting up the peel is to have a really good 3b pioneer. Both R and K call for accurate positioning, and you want to avoid having to place either of them with a stop shot from 3b; but if your 3b pioneer is indifferent you really ought to get Y behind it with such a stop shot. Only if the pioneer is well placed can you afford to play R and K into position from close range and then take off to the ball at 3b.

Are you following the text with one finger on the diagrams? Well, take a look at Fig. 1.48, which shows the early preparation for this peel when you are about to approach 1b off U, having failed to peel after 6. K is too poorly placed a pioneer for the peel before 2b. Ignore R and rush U to spot (1), to give an easy croquet stroke sending U carefully to 3b.

not need a good rush, and K does not obstruct play around penult. The disadvantages of K₃ are that the area from which you can peel is much smaller and that the uncertainty of the pull will often make the peeled ball hit a wire and bounce clear of the hoop. I always prefer to have K at K₁ or K₂. It is not all that difficult to avoid roqueting K in the peeling stroke and the 7-yard rush to 4b really should not hold any terrors by this stage of the game. The pull is quite mild and if R and K are reasonably well placed the peeled ball will always (dare I be so confident?) at least rest in or near the jaws of penult.

There is absolutely no need to peel firmly, because jawsing is quite sufficient if you know what to do afterwards. What you should not do after making 4b is to rush peel R up to rover, which is as inaccurate as it is facile. You should either rush peel softly and send R to rover going to U (note the position of U) or set up an Irish peel in the jaws sending R to rover in the peel stroke. Aim to miss the peg!

If the penult peel has only just got through before 4b you should subsequently try to roquet it to one side of penult and to send it to rover before roqueting U. If things go wrong you may find Y due South of R after croqueting K so that you cannot easily roquet R clear of the hoop. Quite a good idea then is to rush it back into the jaws deliberately and to do the “peel” all over again. If you find you cannot place Y for croquet without it being partly through the hoop you can play it past U and rush U back to

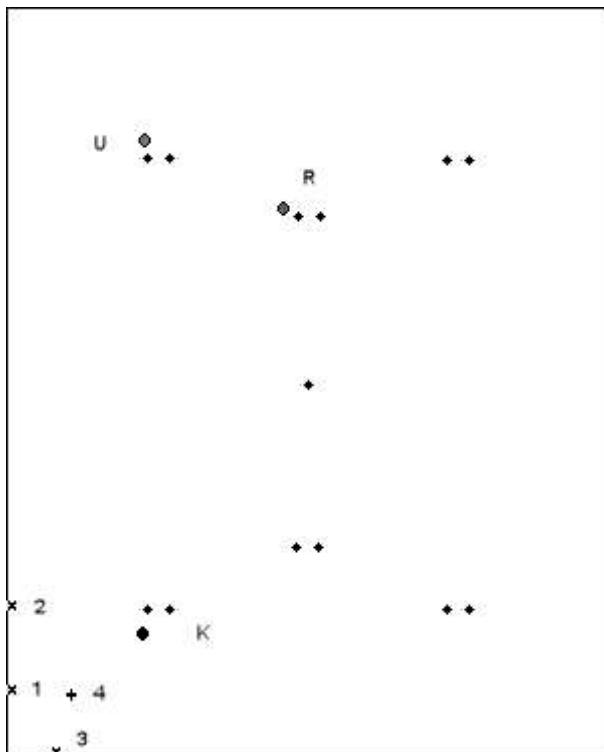


Fig. 1.48 (Y for 1b, croqueting U)

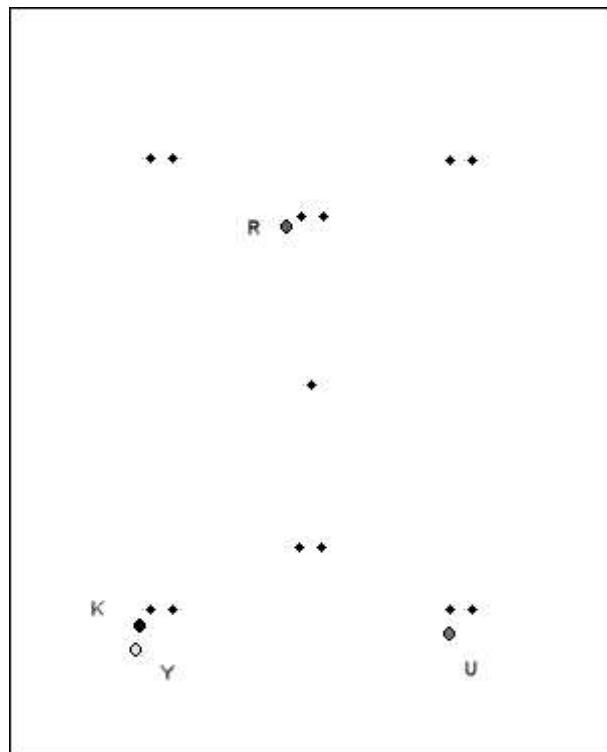


Fig. 1.49 (Y about to make 2b off K)

Well now, were you concentrating? Did you agree with that? I hope not, because it was a deliberate mistake in case you were napping. Anyone who aims at spot (1) from that distance and angle lacks a sense of reality. You cannot be that accurate. If you try for spot (1) there is a serious danger of sending U near spot (2), where K and the hoop may obstruct the subsequent croquet stroke. The correct place to aim for is spot (3), though if you get a dolly rush after 1b you may aim to rush to spot (4).

For reasons which I have given you should send U to 3b from near K and not from near R: you should not risk sending U too near the South boundary. At the same time you should be aware of the limitations of spot (3) as a place from which to send U. A 10% error in the 20-yard stroke could still put U somewhat out of position. If you send U to 3b from near R, you can at least be sure that U will be just to the West of the line of the hoop, which is what you want when you are taking off from near penult.

So although rushing U to R after 1b is second best in Fig. 1.48, it is not a bad second. There are circumstances which make it better to go to R first. Some instances are (a) when U is badly placed for getting a forward rush after 1b; (b) when K is so far from 2b that you may fail to get the rush back to R after 2b; and (c) when R is South of penult and therefore reasonably close to 3b.

Returning to the break, you have reached Fig. 1.49. After making 2b and rushing K back, you send K to an escape position, rush R and take off to U. I shall now consider more fully the positioning of K and R at penult.

At the beginning of this section I referred to two positions for K, shown as K_1 and K_2 in Fig. 1.47. K_1 has the advantage of allowing a stop shot peel but the disadvantage that the peel will seldom be a very short one. K_2 has the advantage of allowing a short peel but the disadvantage of calling for a slightly split roll.

(You avoid the risk of R obstructing your swing when you rush K by doing the peel with a pass roll.)

Whichever of those positions K takes up, it will not matter exactly where you put R if you subsequently get a forward rush after 3b. Consequently you devote your effort to putting R somewhere which will make the peel tolerably easy even if you fail to get the forward rush. Fig. 1.50 is an example of the sort of position which you want to avoid. You have run 3b and

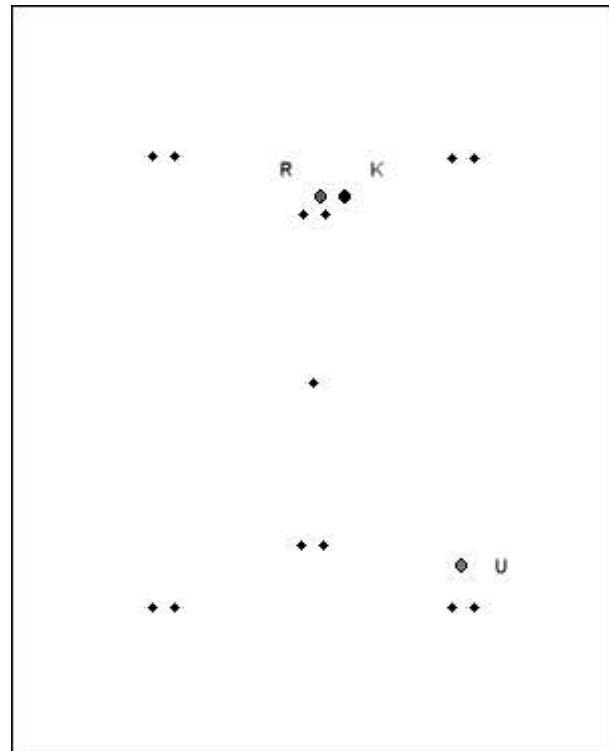


Fig. 1.50 (Y has just run 3b and roqueted U)

roqueted U. To get to R you have to skirt round both K and the hoop and even if you succeed in that you will probably roquet R out of position.

You avoid the jumble of hoop and balls by leaving R slightly to one side or the other of penult and K, so that Y's path to R after 3b is free from obstruction. The dotted areas in Figs. 1.51 and 1.52 show the best areas in which to leave R, depending on where K is. Choose a spot clear of the furniture for your take-off to the ball at 3b. Other things being equal the area nearer to 4b is preferable, as the roll from 3b (if needed) will then be a slightly split one sending U well clear of the other balls.

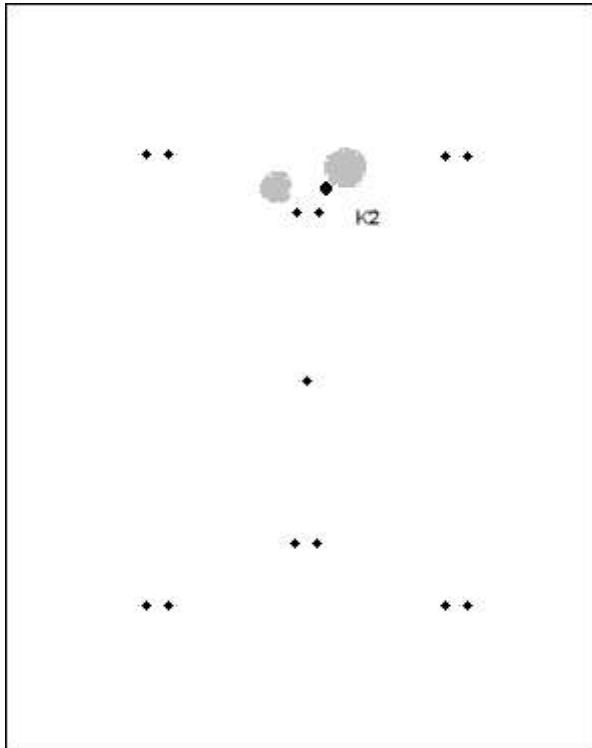


Fig. 1.51 (best areas for R)

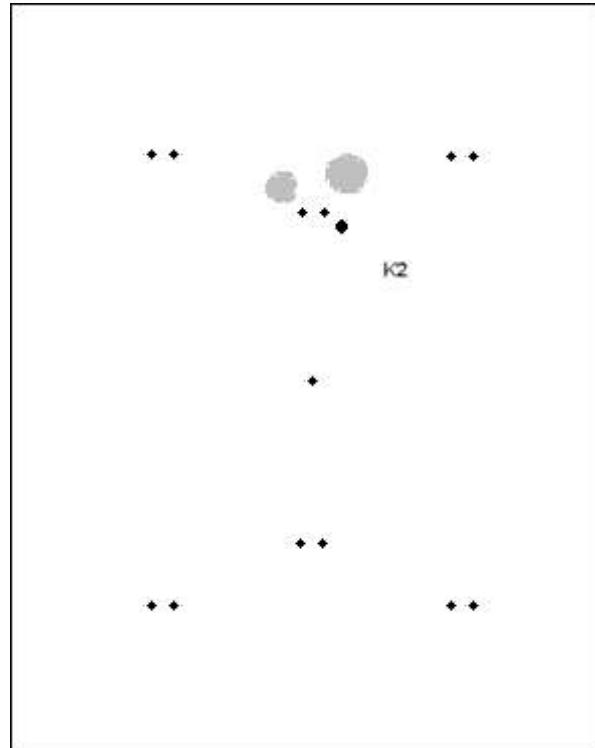


Fig. 1.52 (best areas for R)

My advice about the position of R before 3b involves a conscious decision to put R slightly further away from penult, and so to make the peel more difficult, than it might be. The compensation is that you rely less on getting a good forward rush after 3b. You might disagree to the extent that in some positions you are almost certain to get the forward rush. That does not alter my advice, because (a) if you get the forward rush it really matters very little where R is since if R and K have been properly prepared the peel is trivial anyway and (b) relief from the pressure to get a good forward rush is beyond price. Do not forget, just because I have not dealt with it specifically, that quite often your forward rush turns out to be more of a forward roquet to about level with the peg. In that case it will make all the difference to have R where I advise; and your foreknowledge of this will mean that you are under less pressure when you approach 3b.

When you fail to get a forward rush after 3b you will have to choose between the roll and the take-off. There you must use your own judgment. If you do the take-off leaving U near 3b, you will be embarrassed if you do too clean a penult peel as you will then have no satisfactory penult pioneer. You will do better deliberately to jaws R at penult. Then you pick up U after making 4b and do an Irish peel at penult.

Sometimes your only useful rush on U after 3b will be a cut rush towards rover. Players who prefer to avoid the roll stroke can consider rushing U to rover, taking off to R, doing the peel firmly, making 4b and using R to get a dolly rush on U to penult. Not every manoeuvre in this book comes with the author's recommendation.

I have already given two reasons on page 37 for the recommended position for U in Fig. 1.47. If, unthinkably, the peel before 4b were to be a total failure, U would also be well placed for the purpose of peeling R hard through penult and getting a rush on U to penult. The optimal place for U is a matter for personal taste, but I should suggest a spot about 5 feet South and 2 feet West of penult.

In this section I have written largely for the benefit of my more skilful readers. I have expected you to place R, K and U within two feet or so of given spots. To do this you need good rushes after 2b and 3b. If you thought my demands extravagant, you were wrong. Try it. It is not all that difficult. If you are not yet quite good enough for that, never mind. An understanding of what to try for will still often be of help.

I have dealt with the positioning of R, K and U when you have good control of the break. It is obvious enough how to muddle through when your break is slightly uncontrolled and I need not say anything particular about it. The amount of space which I have devoted to this peel is an indication of its importance. It is the *pons asinorum* of the triple peel.

1.III.7 The straight penult peel (except in the straight triple)

The success of the straight double peel depends largely on sheer skill. There is little worth writing about. If you have been unable to do an Irish peel you will often want to cannon the peeled ball towards rover after making penult and roqueting U. The position is shown in Fig. 1.53.

In order to avoid interference by U after the cannon you should try to set it up at a slight angle on the same side of the court as the rover pioneer. If you foresee the likelihood of the cannon you can make it easier by putting K rather short of rover. Fig. 1.53 illustrates both these points.

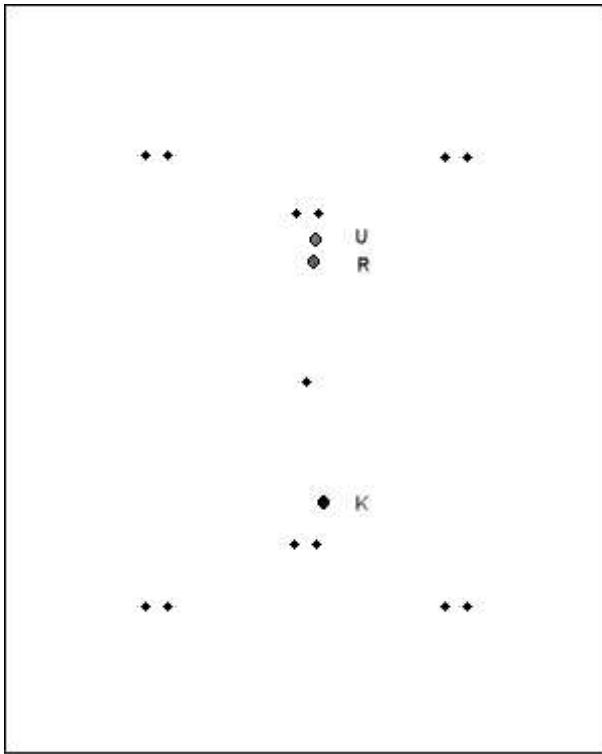


Fig. 1.53 (Y for rover, croqueting U; R for rover)

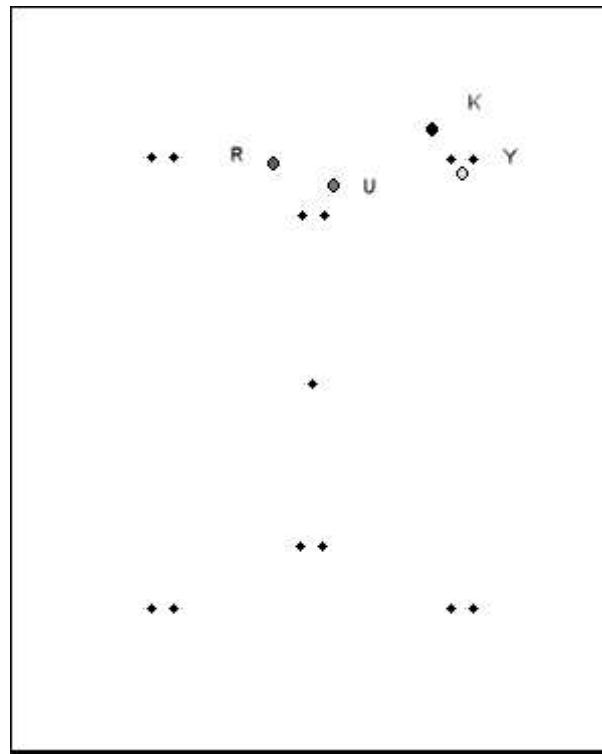


Fig. 1.54 (Y about to run 4b)

You will often reach penult with quite a ragged position calling for sound judgment. Sometimes you would do best to abandon the triple at this stage and concentrate on making a really good leave.

In Fig. 1.54 where you are about to run 4b with no ball near to penult, I recommend that you rush K back a little after making 4b and send it to rover, getting a rush on U to R. Stop-shot U just past penult, rush R and do the peel even if it is from 3 feet or so. That length of straight peel is unattractive to some people but I find it very dependable, even with new balls. If your rush to penult leaves you in serious doubt about the peel, turn your attention to the leave: at least all the balls are now close to useful hoops.

Rather than follow that plan, you might have had in mind going to R before U, hoping to use U to cannon R through penult if it ended up in the jaws. That would be asking for trouble. U is too far from the hoop for safety and even if you did not break down your lack of control after running penult would probably force you to make an inferior leave.

Part IV: The Rover Peel and Peg-Out

1.IV.1 The rover peel before 3b

When planning to peel before 3b, you will generally arrange for R to be near rover when you make 2b (off K, say). Then you send K to 4b and rush R in front of rover. Your 3b pioneer must be good enough for the peel attempt not to endanger the break. (If it is not good enough you should usually postpone the peel until after 3b, as described on page 45.) Your position will fall into one of four categories:

Fig. 1.55: The peel is possible, but uncertain. K is reasonably well placed.

Fig. 1.56: The peel is almost unmissable.

Fig. 1.57: The peel is impossible or should not be attempted.

Fig. 1.58: The peel is possible but uncertain. K is poorly placed.

In Fig. 1.55 you do not need to get the peeled ball right through, the jaws being good enough. Consequently you should do the peel as gently as possible. Obviously if the peel is virtually certain to succeed, as in Fig. 1.56, you try it rather more firmly. It is sometimes hard to judge how certain the peel is. I myself tend to play safe and only peel deliberately firmly if I am absolutely sure that I shall succeed or if the angle of the split shot leaves me no alternative. (I mention an exception to this later on.)

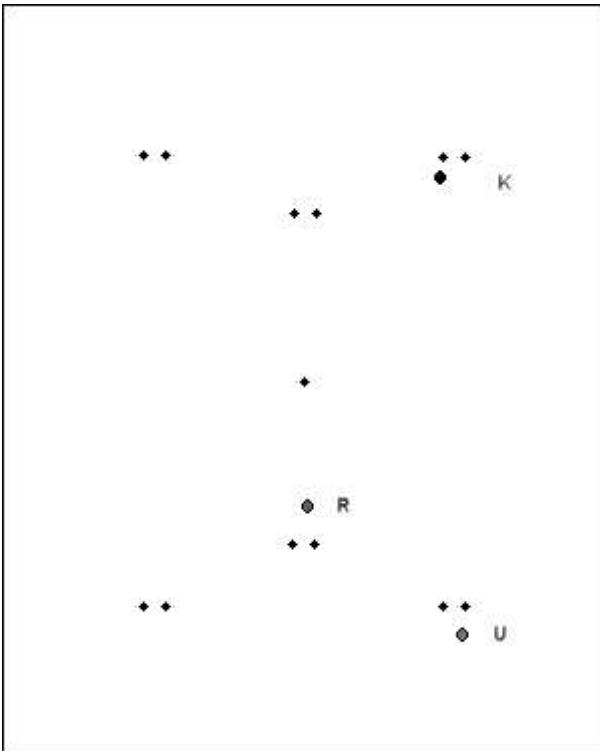
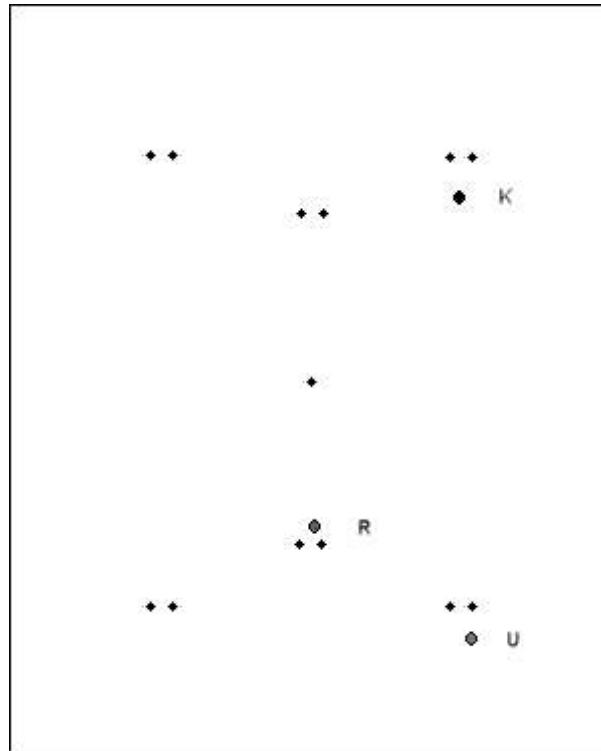
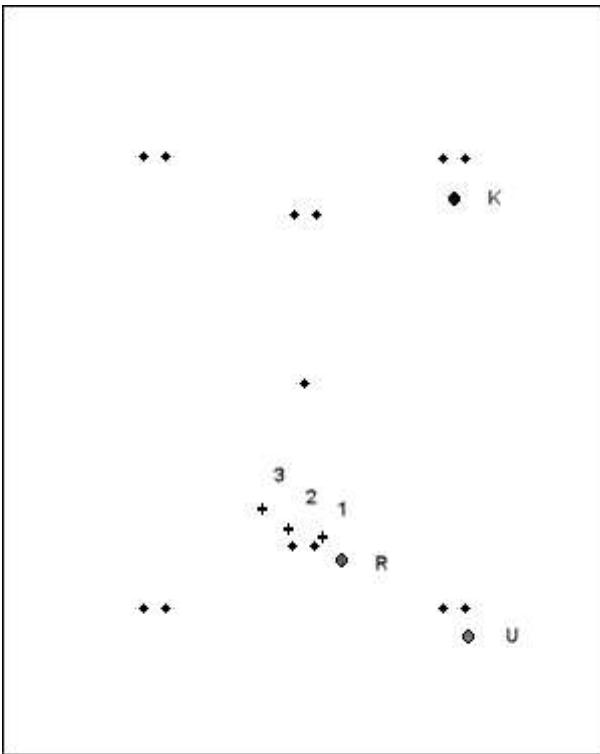
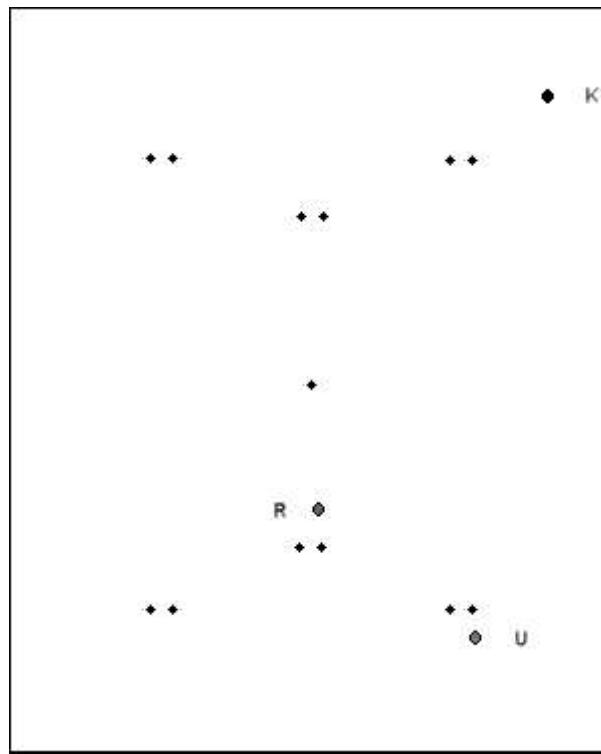
*Fig. 1.55 (Yfor 1b, croqueting R)**Fig. 1.56 (Yfor 1b, croqueting R)*

Fig. 1.57 shows two positions (R and spot (1)) from which you cannot peel R and two (spots (2) and (3)) from which you should not try. The general case, typified by “R”, is widely misunderstood. Players either treat R as a pivot ball or they nudge it towards rover, in each case intending to set up a straight peel. Instead you should take the excellent chance to peel after 3b, with which I deal later.

There are certain positions near spot (1) from which you stand a good chance of jawsing R with a take-off to U, even though you cannot peel it. Sometimes this is worth doing even though you then have a 4-yard roquet on U.

*Fig. 1.57 (Yfor 3b, croqueting R)**Fig. 1.58 (Yfor 3b, croqueting R)*

From spot (2), which is only a few inches from the hoop, it is tempting to do a thin take-off in the hope of a later rush peel. A moment's thought shows the folly of this. You cannot afford to try the rush peel when you are for 4b or penult in case R ends up in the jaws; and the rush peel at rover is an uncertain weapon since a slightly inaccurate rush may deprive you of the peel

altogether. Even if you are not going to try the rush peel, spot (2) is too good a position for R: it is hugging its hoop. So my advice when R is at spot (2) is to do a thick take-off and to use R as a temporary pivot ball.

Unless you are really reliable at pass rolls I advise you to use R as a pivot ball when it is at spot (3) also. The angle is extreme for the peel, the hoop is wiring you from where you want to go and R may obstruct the passage of Y to U.

In Fig. 1.58 the principal aim must be get a good rush to the poorly placed K after 3b. You may do this by using R as a pivot ball, sending U to penult and getting a rush on R, or you may try the peel after 3b. What you should not do is to try the peel immediately unless you really know what you are doing, because doing so virtually commits you to getting a forward rush after 3b if the peel sticks. If you insist on trying the peel, do it firmly in the hope that if it fails R will bounce clear of the hoop.

1.IV.2 The rover peel after 3b

The most common opportunity for this peel arises when you find yourself using R as the 3b pioneer. In Fig. 1.59 you have just made 1b and roqueted U too near to R to be able to send U to 3b and do the rush peel. You send U to 4b or the peg, rush peel R and send it to 3b going to K.

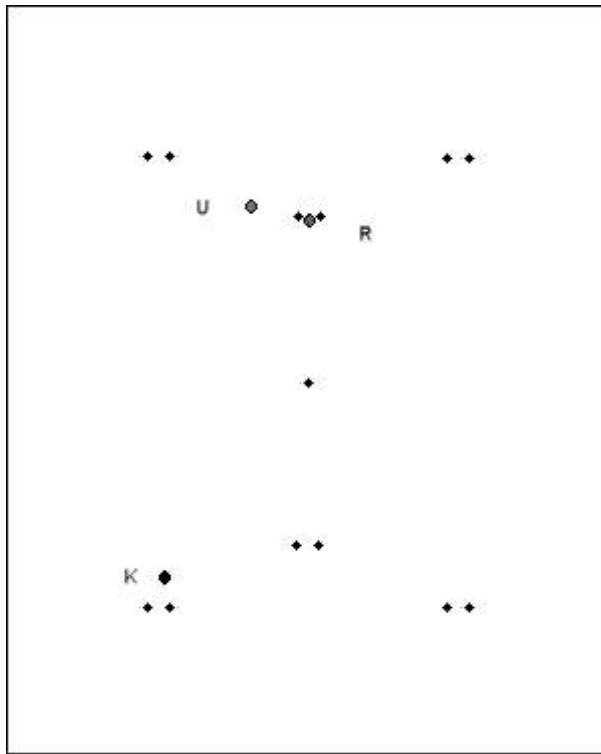


Fig. 1.59 (Y for 2b, croquetting U)

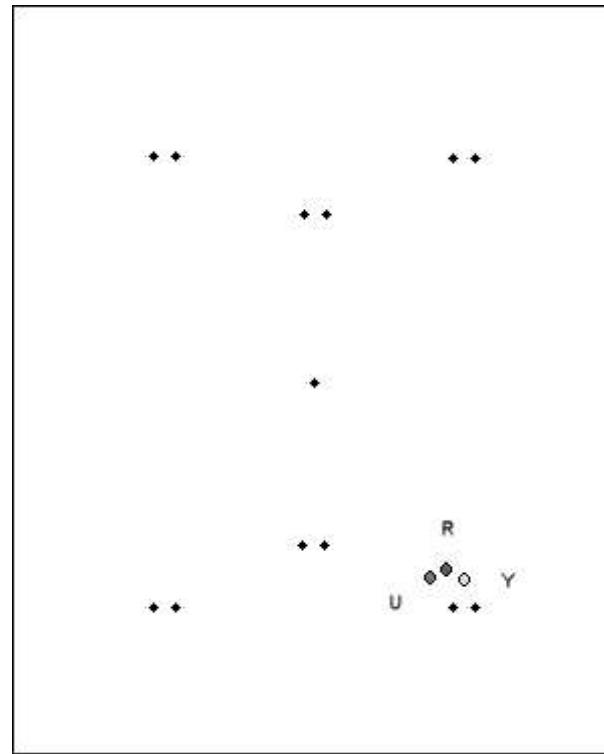


Fig. 1.60 (Y has just run 3b; K is anywhere around 4b)

From Fig. 1.57 ("R") or Fig. 1.58, you roll R to the position shown in Fig. 1.60 which shows where the balls will lie just after you have run 3b. Now you rush R back to rover and peel it or jaws it, getting a rush on U to K.

This scheme can lead to trouble if both U and K are indifferently placed. Having rushed R to rover you will have to take stock and decide whether to peel or to make sure of the rush on U by taking off to it.

In Fig. 1.61 you have just run 2b and your 3b pioneer is hopelessly inadequate. Send K to 4b, rush R behind U and send it to spot (1), ready for the rush to rover.

1.IV.3 Jawsing before or after 3b: how to continue

The general rule here is: if in doubt, leave R alone. To fiddle around with it unnecessarily is a beginner's mistake. The only exception is when you fail to get a forward rush after 3b, when you can use R as a pivot ball. Otherwise, leave R until you too are for rover. Then you either rush peel it or Irish peel it. That general rule also applies (a) when R is on the wire of rover and cannot be rush peeled and (b) when R is only just through the hoop.

1.IV.4 The rover peel before 4b or before penult

Do this if you must. Don't say I told you to. (Cotter does (page 87), but Solomon (page 62) seems to share my attitude.)

1.IV.5 The straight rover peel (other than a straight double or triple)

The principal problem about the straight rover peel is that the peeled ball may not go through cleanly. All the manoeuvring that precedes the peel is designed to anticipate this event and culminates in one or both of two sequences.

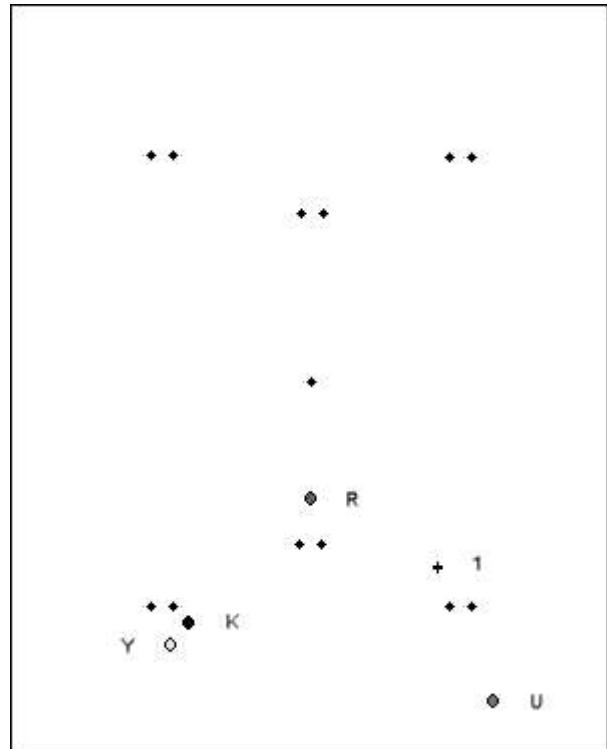


Fig. 1.61 (Y has just run 2b)

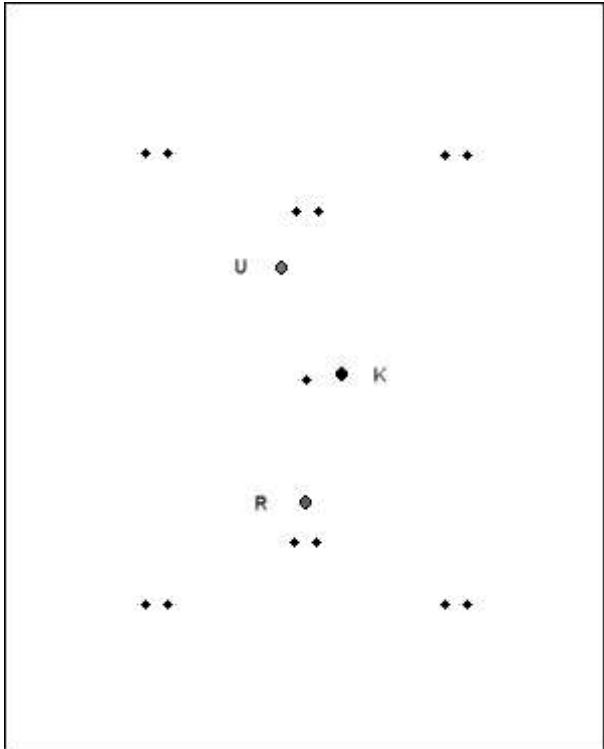


Fig. 1.62 (Y for rover, croqueting U)

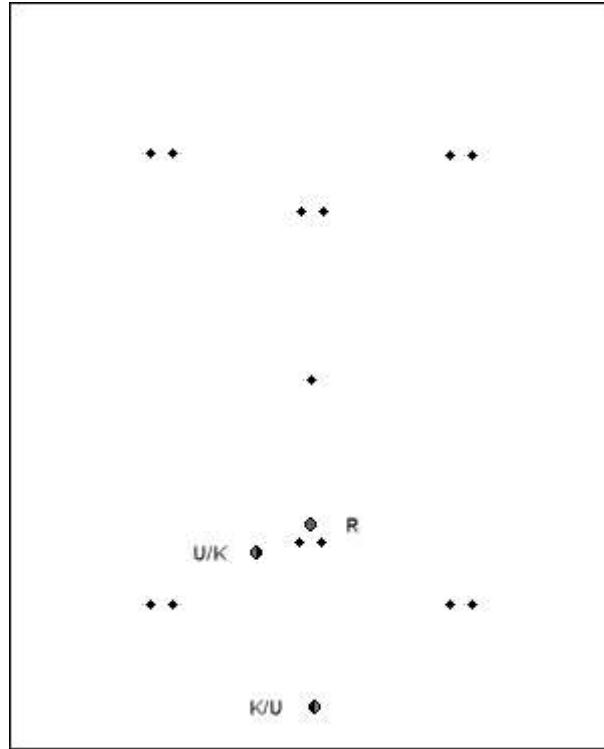


Fig. 1.63 (Y for rover, croqueting R)

The first sequence (which I shall call “the stop shot method”) is shown in Figs. 1.62 and 1.63. You have just run penult and roqueted U. No very special preparation has been needed: you have merely seen to it that R is really well placed at rover. Placing U and K as in Fig. 1.63 is straightforward. You put all your effort into rushing R into perfect position in front of rover. If the peel sticks, you jump or half-jump over R, possibly going to the boundary. (Failure to have a ball near the boundary was where the player went wrong in the incident recounted on page 3. Strangely, Cotter (page 81) advises having all four balls round rover. Even Homer nods. Not so Solomon (page 59).) Because you may have to jump, try to avoid getting too near to rover when approaching it.

If by mischance you have to keep both U and K at rover when you do the peel, have one of them directly to one side of the hoop and the other almost due South so that you cannot get hoop bound.

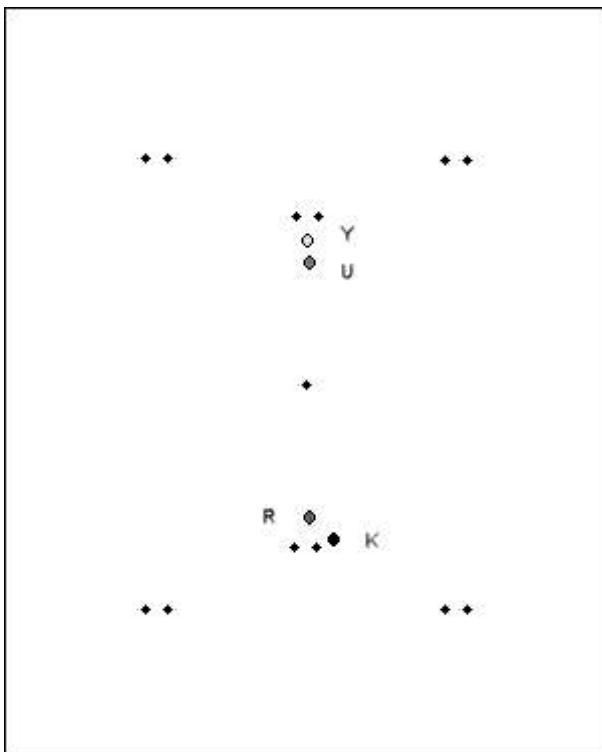


Fig. 1.64 (Y has just run penult)

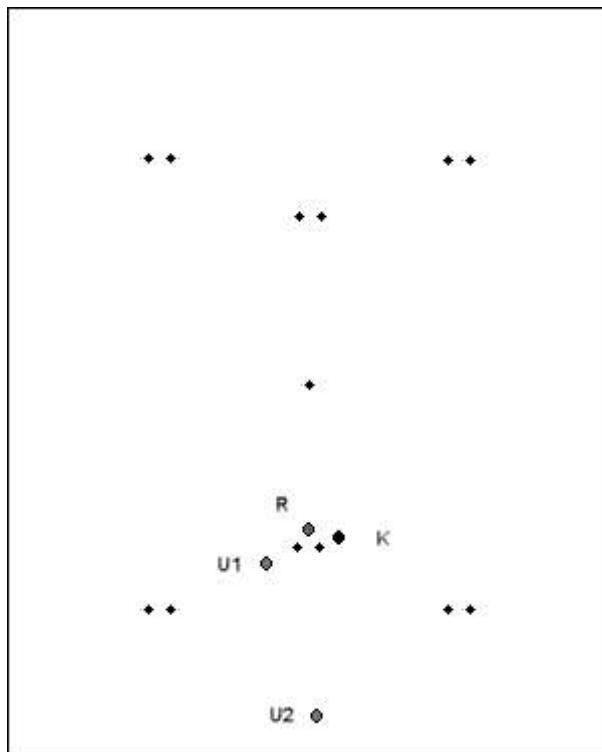


Fig. 1.65 (Y for rover, croqueting R)

The second sequence (“the cannon method” - see Figs. 1.64 and 1.65) calls for more accurate preparation, since both R and K should be well placed and you need a forward rush after penult. If you succeed in that, you have the luxury of peeling R before you have had K and you can then use K to cannon R through rover if it has stuck, or away from the hoop if it has only just gone through. You will generally have a choice between sending U to U₁ or U₂ in Fig. 1.65. I prefer U₂ for two reasons. First, you sometimes need to jump over R because the cannon has not worked; and secondly, the use of K for the cannon sometimes makes the hoop approach a little inaccurate and it is comforting to be able to run rover hard. There is a respectable reason for sending U to U₁, namely that with U there you do not have to bother where K goes after it has cannoned (or missed!) R.

As I have already pointed out, very little preparation is needed for the stop shot method. Remember that R needs to be well placed. I gave one tip on how to make this easier on page 5, namely to put the penult pioneer South of the hoop.

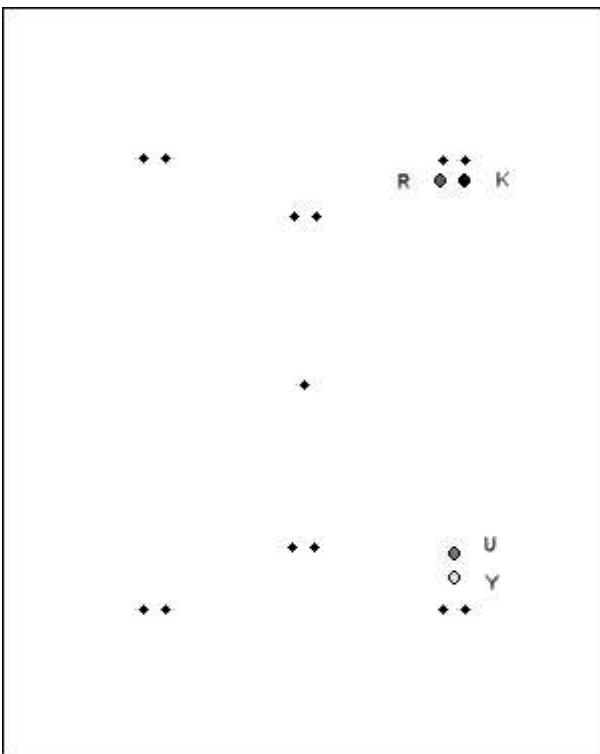


Fig. 1.66 (Y has just run 3b)

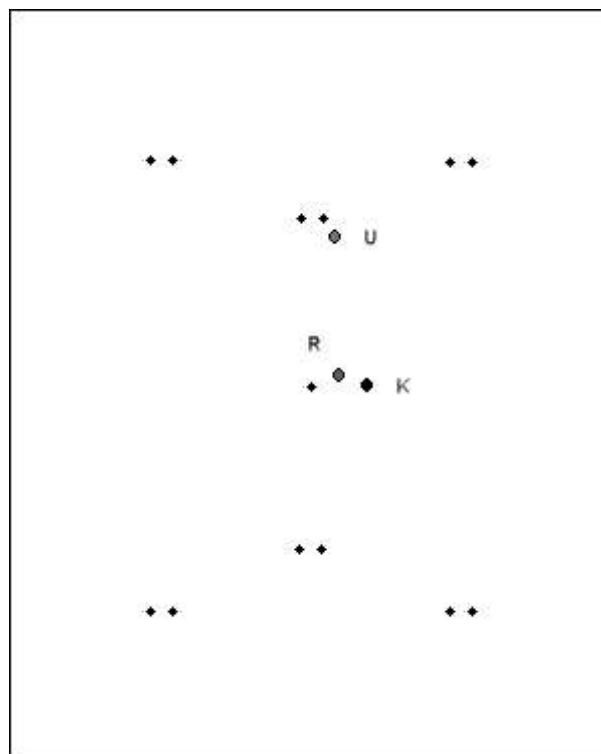


Fig. 1.67 (Y for penult, croqueting K)

Preparation for the cannon method, quite apart from calling for careful break planning, involves what may come as a surprise to some people: given that you will have no trouble in getting both R and K more or less into position before making penult, of the two of them it is K that needs to be the more accurately placed. If K is out of position you must either cannon it into position with U (What's that cannon doing here? It belongs in Part VI!) or you must abandon the method; whereas if R is out of position you still have the rush on it to come. In particular, you can much more easily afford to have R taken a yard or two off course by a bad stroke or unevenness in the lawn than you can K. You will usually have no real choice as to which of R and K to give preference to. Sometimes you do, as in Fig. 1.66 where you have just run 3b. If you wish to use the cannon method you should make 4b off K with R at the peg (not the other way round), leading to Fig. 1.67 after you have made 4b and rushed K. K then gets sent to position from 7 yards and R is rushed level with U and sent to position from 12 yards.

When you make 4b I suggest using R as a pivot ball rather than having a ball at rover. The alternative often involves sending the ball inaccurately to rover from quite a distance. That would not matter but for the fact that if you fail to get the rush after 4b both R and K may be poorly placed when you run penult.

All the same, it is a perfectly respectable plan to have a ball at rover. If you do, make it K rather than R, as in Fig. 1.68, so that you can perfect its position before you make penult. (Note the different position of U. You expect to take off to it from near rover.) Remember too that, if you prefer to have a ball at rover, it may suit you in positions like Fig. 1.66 to send U there after making 3b and to send K to penult. Incidentally, one slight advantage of having an opponent's ball at rover is that you will occasionally get a good enough rush on R after 4b to do the peel immediately.

You will usually have to take stock, at the latest just after running penult, to decide which method to use. Your choice will probably depend on your personal attitude to the strokes involved, particularly the split shot peel. The stop shot method is very accurate but sometimes leaves you no escape in a crisis; whereas you pay for the escape route given by the cannon method by submitting to the inherent uncertainty of the split shot. Very occasionally you can have the best of both worlds. If in Fig. 1.65 you have positioned K two feet or so North East or North West of

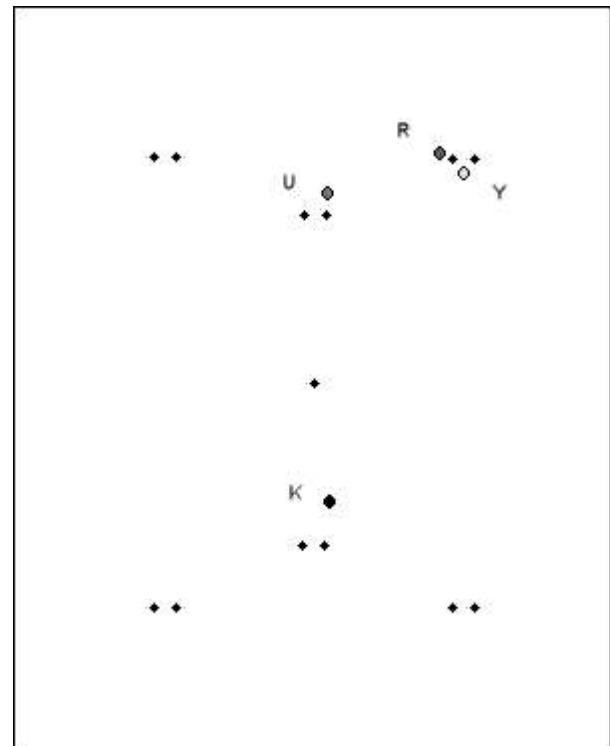


Fig. 1.68 (Y for 4b)

rover you can do a stop shot peel and still have the cannon available if the peel goes wrong.

A plausible approach to the straight rover peel is to set out to use the cannon method and to switch to the stop shot method if you fail to position K satisfactorily; but this approach may leave you with R less well positioned at rover than it would have been if you had opted for the stop shot method from the outset. There is much to be said for the simplicity which the stop shot method brings to the break.

1.IV.6 The peg-out

By far the commonest problem with the peg-out at the end of the triple occurs when R is in line with the hoop after a straight rover peel. Time and again one sees players fussing around and getting into trouble trying to cannon R to one side when it is of no importance to do so. Unless it is really close to the hoop you will generally do far better to concentrate on getting a dolly rush on R to a spot 3 yards or so wide of the peg.

The combination peg-out is dangerous. Perhaps it is unadventurous of me, but I regard it as a desperate measure. I do not advocate it in serious play unless there is a ball irretrievably in baulk or (after peeling your opponent) you are conceding contact; though you might speculatively take the initial step of croqueting R to the peg with the intention of simply pegging Y out if the combination peg-out did not fall into your lap.

There is a spectacular variation of the combination peg-out in which you peg both balls out in one stroke with a half-jump cannon.

Part V: The Straight Triple, The Three-Ball Triple and Some Leaves

1.V.1 The straight triple

Though Solomon and Cotter write as if the straight triple were a rarity calling for a good deal of luck, it is now done so often that occurrences attract only fleeting attention. The normal version aims for the position in Fig. 1.69, where you have just run 4b. You rush K to III and send it to rover getting a rush on R to penult; or, if you prefer, you roquet K more gently and either send it a little South of penult or take off to R so as to increase your chance of getting a dolly rush on R. The rest is (I hope) obvious. The moves leading up to Fig. 1.69 will be equally clear to you if you have grasped what I have said so far.

The Solomon variation is to roquet K softly in Fig. 1.69 and to use it to cannon R to penult. In preparation for this cannon you should place U not as shown but near spot (1), so that after the cannon Y goes well clear of R and K. This variation requires you to have good control when you make 3b, as K has to be carefully positioned when you run 4b.

Solomon (page 65) would have you do a stop shot Irish peel at penult and rely on R as the rover pioneer. I prefer to send U to rover and to play for a forward rush on R after penult. This has the advantage of a safe penult peel, a safe penult hoop and a safe rover hoop, which I regard as more than adequate compensation for the difficulty of the rover peel. (I should mention that Solomon was still developing this variation when he wrote his book.) My own variation is rather more difficult. You make 3b with R well placed at 4b and K in the position shown in Figs.

1.70 and 1.71. Then you rush U forward, send it to penult and rush R to get Fig. 1.70. Now you peel *softly*, to reach Fig. 1.71. If the peel works, you rush K to spot (1) and approach 4b with a stop shot, cannoning R. If you try to send R all the way to penult you risk giving yourself a difficult 4b hoop, so be content to send it about two-thirds of the way. The rest is obvious.

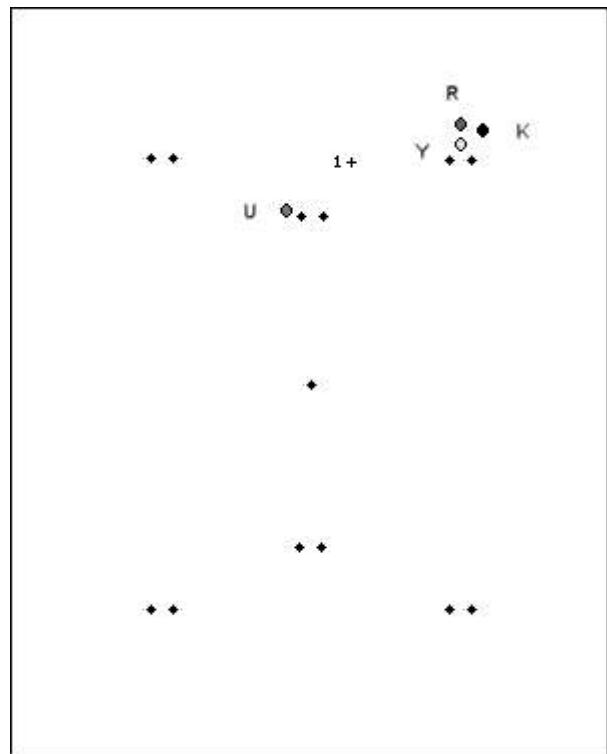


Fig. 1.69 (Y has just run 4b; R for penult)

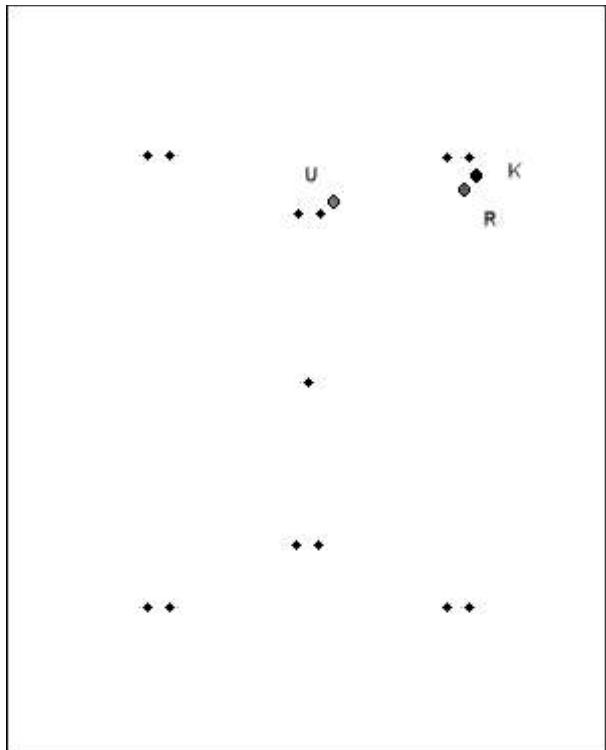


Fig. 1.70 (Y for 4b, croqueting R)

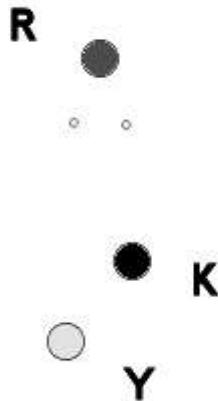
SCALE**one yard****+ 1**

Fig. 1.71 (Y for 4b, about to roquet K)

The position of K is critical. The soft 4b peel may stick in the jaws, in which case you need to cannon it through with K, leading to a normal straight triple. K can fulfil this dual function only if it is positioned about a foot in front of 4b and a little to the right. You can theoretically use the same method with K out of position, as in Fig. 1.72 for example. However, that example would involve a tremendously difficult peel of R. Only with K more or less in the correct position can you do a comfortable stop shot peel, without which you would do far better to use one of the simpler straight triple methods.

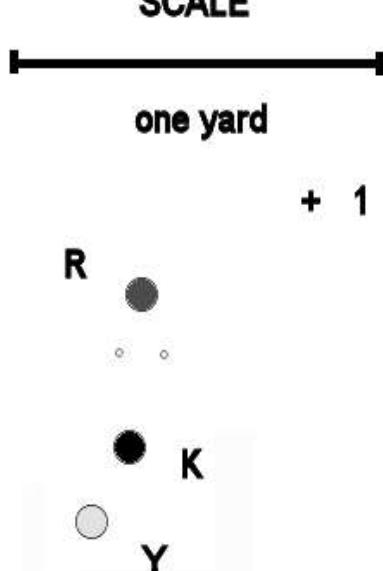


Fig. 1.72 (Y for 4b, about to peel R)

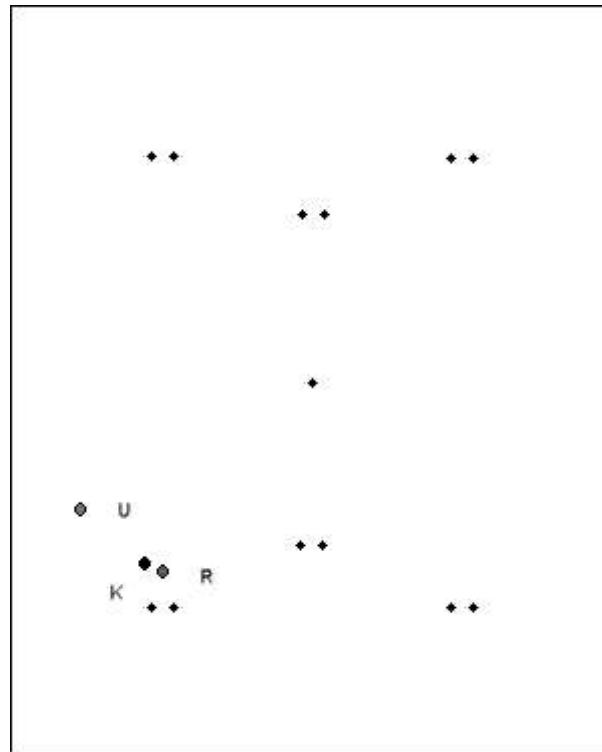


Fig. 1.73 (Y for 2b, croqueting U)

Though both R and K need to be well placed, K obviously matters more. In Fig. 1.73, where you have just made 1b and rushed U, roquet K next and send it down to 4b. You then perfect the position of K after making 2b. Placing K correctly while getting back to U at 3b requires total mastery of the take-off.

This is a show-piece variation. It gives the precision player the opportunity to profit from his skill. His reward for accurately preparing for the first peel is that the second and third peels are genuinely easy and safe. There is no point in trying this variation unless you are really good at the strokes involved.

1.V.2 Four tips on doing straight peels

(a) There are three ways of doing straight angled peels. First, you can do a straight stop shot leaving yourself an angled hoop. You cannot use this way if you may want to make the hoop with a half-jump, as that is dangerous if you are not straight in front of the hoop. The second is to do an Irish peel. I was once told by someone who had perfected this stroke that he found it entirely reliable. You need a pilot ball to one side of the hoop in case you only just run it with your own ball. In both methods you line up the balls so as just to miss the near wire. I dislike the first because a slight roll may make your hoop too angled; and the second because only a small error will cause your own ball to miss the jaws of the hoop.

I prefer to peel with a slight split shot, even though this means that there will be some pull. By this stage of the game you really ought to know how much pull to expect. Grit your teeth and line up the balls very slightly into the near wire. It really does work.

(b) My next tip applies to peels from between about 4 feet and about 3 yards. From less than about 4 feet the peel is almost certain to be on target and from more than about 3 yards the peeled ball should be rolling well enough when it reaches the hoop to wriggle through even if it is not going quite straight. However, in the middle range the ball may be off target and still skidding. Other factors permitting, you should weight the stroke so that the peeled ball stops skidding just before reaching the hoop.

(c) Sometimes when the peeled ball sticks in the jaws you feel you cannot afford to try a half-jump peel, as in Fig. 1.74. There is an uncommon and rather unnerving stroke which is occasionally worth trying if the peeled ball is almost through the hoop. You play the stroke without any significant jump, but by playing slightly down on your ball you ensure that it rolls and does not skid. When it strikes the peeled ball it stops momentarily, but its spin then carries it on through the hoop. You will need a pilot ball to one side of the hoop.

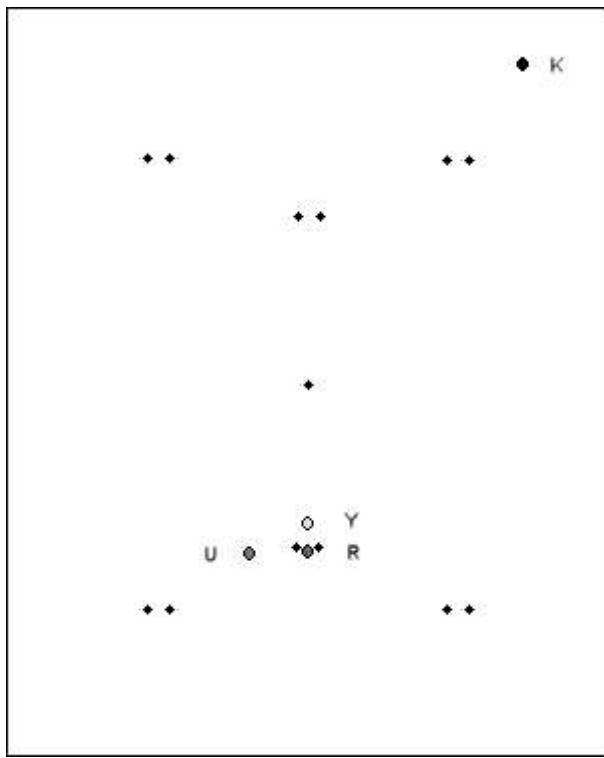


Fig. 1.74 (Y about to run rover)

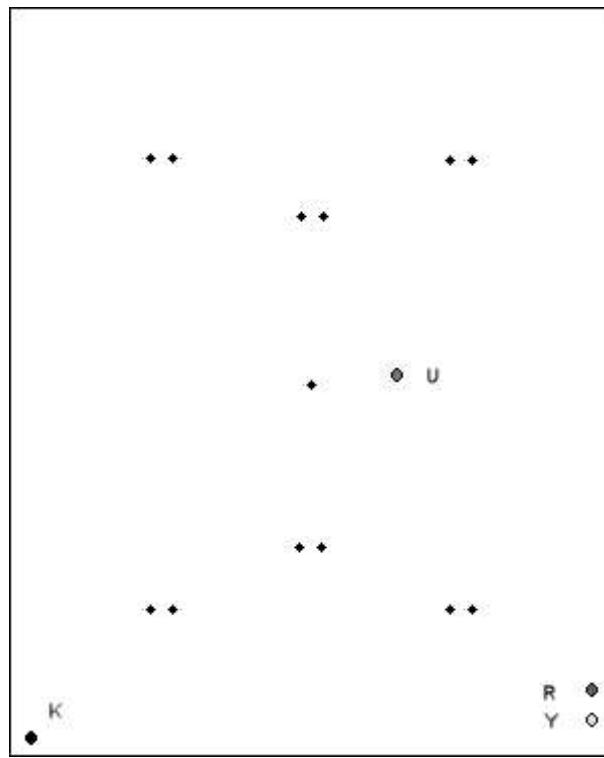


Fig. 1.75 (Yfor 2; Rfor 4b)

(d) I got my confidence in straight peels as a result of a practice routine of mine: you do a three-ball break in which you have to try a straight peel on the pioneer at each hoop if it at all possible. The most I have managed so far is 10 peels in 12 hoops, but I am sure that that can be bettered. The purpose of the routine is to get a wide range of split shots (the compulsory peel attempts stop you getting rushes), but you also really get to know the straight peel. It quickly teaches you how to line them up, how much pull to allow for and how to do half-jumps.

1.V.3 The three-ball triple

When UK has declined to shoot after your first turn (as in Fig. 1.75) you can reasonably easily pick up a delayed triple. For example, when you are for 4 you might send K to 5 with a pass roll going to your pioneer if it is a good one. With K in some position other than the first corner the task of picking up all four balls is even easier.

So we may as well face the fact that the three-ball triple, in which you complete a triple without using K at all, is not an exercise in pragmatism. The three-ball triple is “fancy”. It would be unfair to call it pure exhibitionism, as it represents the nearest that croquet will ever get to artistry. The value of achieving it depends vitally on the standing of your opponent and the occasion of the match. Without the piquancy of the serious risk of your losing the game if you make a false move, such a flamboyant coup can become patronising and tiresome.

As for the break itself, you do the 4b peel after 3 and make 4 and 5 off U with a short two-ball break. Then you rush U near III and make 6 off R, which you then peel through penult getting a rush on U to 1b. You want to do the peel quite firmly because R is to be your 2b pioneer. Now a three-ball break brings R to rover for the last peel. This break calls for some accurate rushing, but it is manageable so long as the rushes work. If they fail, or if a peel sticks in the jaws, only raw skill and impudence will see you through.

Here are a few tips. (a) If you have a dolly rush to 4, aim it two or three feet to the right to avoid the hoop getting in the way of U during your approach. (b) Only try for a true forward rush after 1b if you are confident of getting one. Otherwise send U well up the lawn when you approach 1b so that an ordinary roquet will be enough to send it within range of R. (c) Be prepared to abandon the second peel. The three-ball straight double is reasonably easy, but remember that in order to get R to penult in a natural sequence you want to make 2b off U and not off R. If you find it unavoidable to send R to 2b, you might as well put your pride in your pocket and pick up K. (d) Remember when sending U to penult after 3b to put it a little on the non-playing side of the hoop so as to shorten the vital stroke that sends R to rover.

1.V.4 Some leaves

When you reach the point where the triple is no longer viable you generally have little leisure to do anything complicated with the leave. You have four main objectives: (a) to lengthen UK's shot; (b) to give yourself an easy finish; (c) to try to make UK lift a particular ball; and (d) to deprive UK of a break if he hits in.

The respective values of (a), (b) and (c) are sometimes overstated. As to (a), only very rarely will you be able to deprive UK of a shot of 15 yards or less. There is a limit to how much effort should be devoted to making the length of the shot 15 yards rather than 13 yards. As to (b), it would indeed be a poor leave that gave you no prospect of an easy rush to your hoop, and few simple leaves can give you much more. As to (c), there is no such thing as “forcing” a particular ball to play if you are in any event able to go out easily if UK misses the shot: UK is then forced to take his best shot. The best you can do will usually be to combine objectives (b) and (c) in your leave so that if UK lifts the ball you do not want him to play he has to leave his other ball at your hoop.

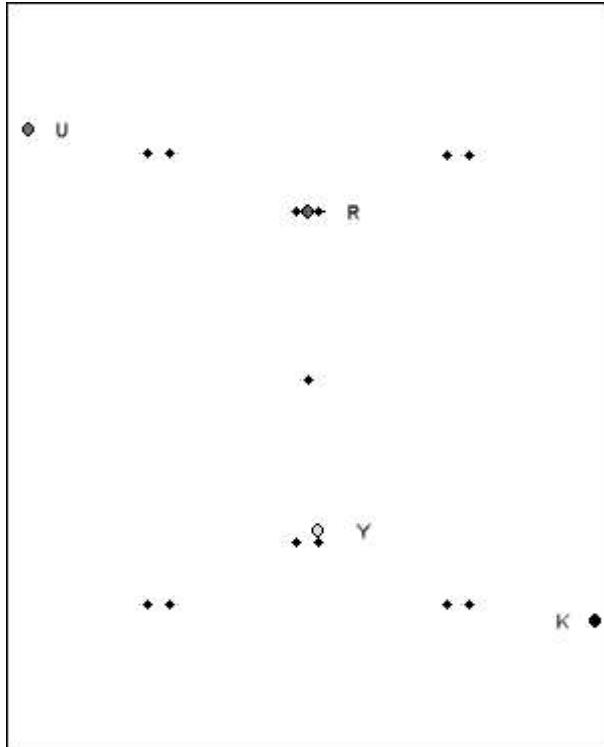


Fig. 1.76 (R for penult)

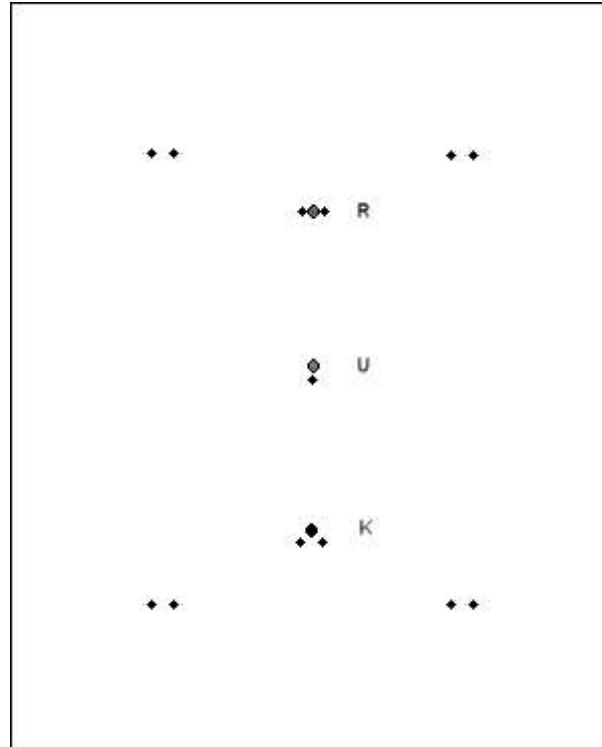


Fig. 1.77 (R for penult, Y pegged out)

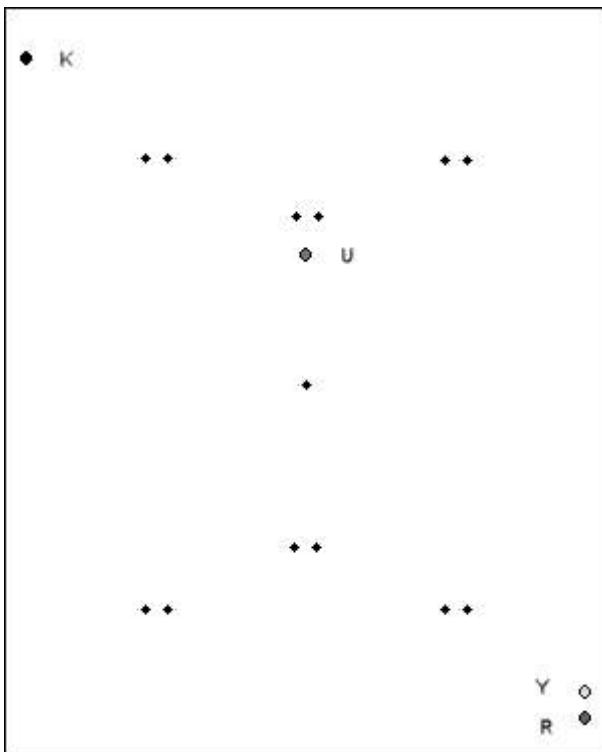


Fig. 1.78 (R for penult)

The part played by (d) in leaves in general is often overlooked. Since after a failed triple you can rarely do much else, you should take what opportunity you have to stop UK getting an easy break if he hits in. Fig. 1.76 shows an unusual break-denying leave which is quite easy to make. I prefer it to the admittedly wittier Fig. 1.77 (Prince v. Prichard, Wanganui 1979). You should leave Y on the yard-line in Fig. 1.78 or Fig. 1.79 rather than give R a rush into the court. If UK shoots and misses you do not need the rush and I do not suppose you will complain if he finesse.

Fig. 1.80 is sometimes denounced as a Forbidden Leave: you force UK to take a 13-yard shot and give him a laid break if he hits. That is not always a valid criticism. After that leave UK is in virtually the same position as he would be in after Fig. 1.78 if he chose to lift K. Yet on some occasions UK would lift K anyway in Fig. 1.78, even though “forced” to lift U. You then lose nothing by making the Forbidden Leave.

An example of such an occasion would be a match between really strong players where K was for 1 and U for 4b. UK would then be motivated to lift K whatever the leave, making a mockery of any attempt to “force” him to do otherwise. Such a scenario presupposes that you as RY will need little advice from me.

Might I respectfully suggest something like the variations shown in Fig. 1.81 or the “diagonal spread” (see Fig. 2.3) preventing UK from rushing U to K’s hoop?

Undoubtedly a lesser player would feel constrained to play with U in Fig. 1.78 and against such an opponent you should generally not use the Fig. 1.80 leave or anything like it: but what if you, not yet being an expert yourself, are playing someone who is and you are shaking like a leaf? Perhaps then you would do better to meet the crisis head-on with the Forbidden Leave because of its idiot-proof finish if UK misses.

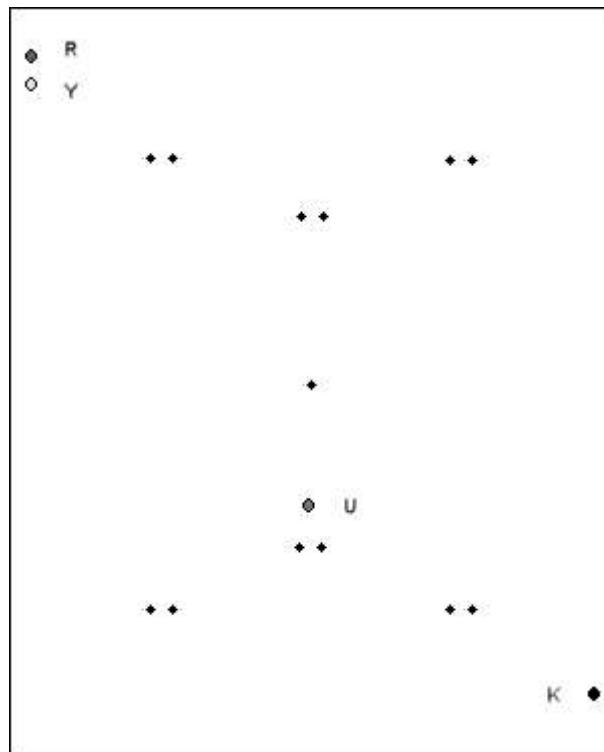


Fig. 1.79 (R for rover)

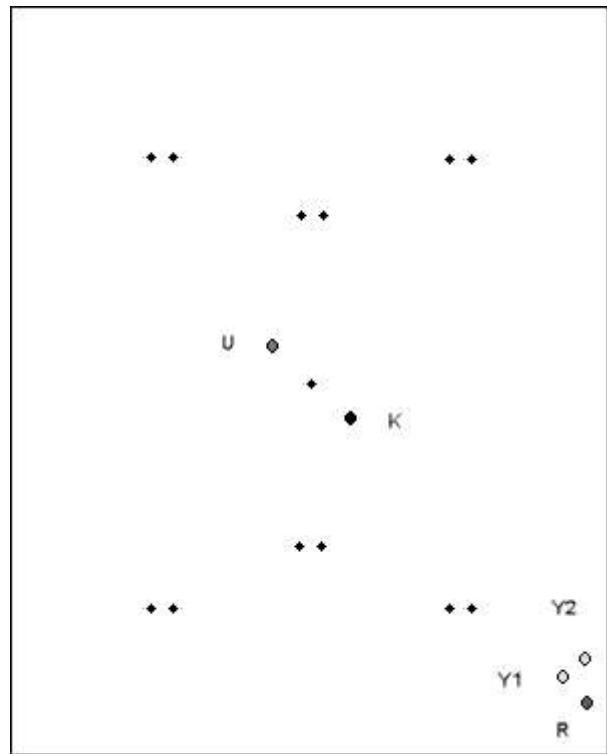


Fig. 1.80 (R for penult or rover)

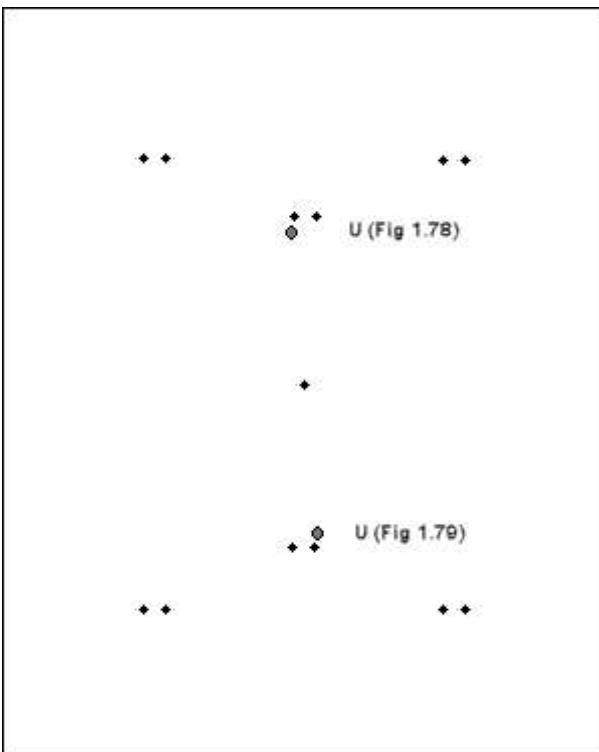


Fig. 1.81 (variations of Figs. 1.78 and 1.79)

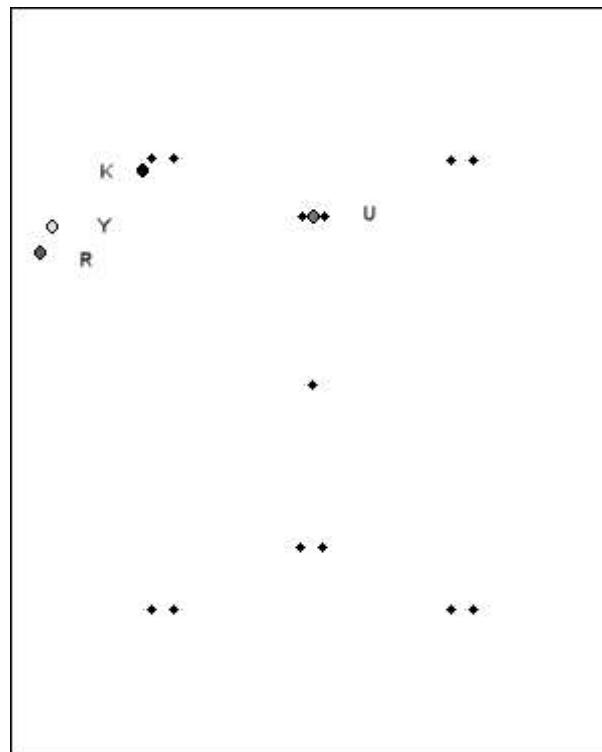


Fig. 1.82 (R for penult)

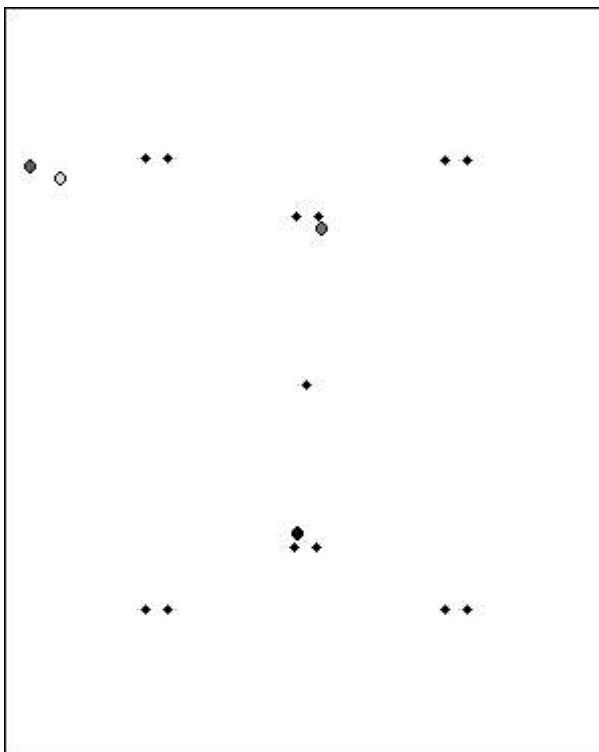


Fig. 1.83 (R for rover)

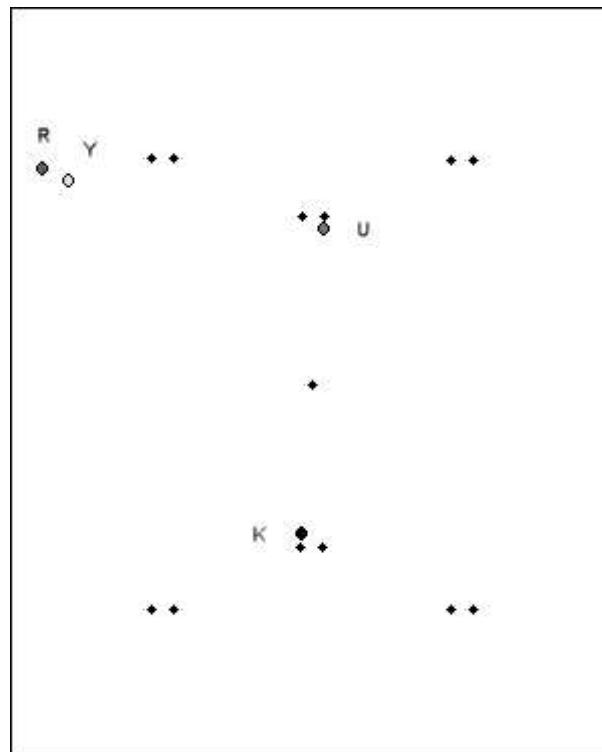


Fig. 1.84 (R for penult)

I have said enough on this subject and present some other leaves in Figs. 1.82, 1.83 and 1.84 without further comment except to remind you that Figs. 1.78 and 1.79 are *good leaves*, for all their simplicity. You should only bother with something fancier if there is a real advantage to be gained from it.

Part VI: Epideixis

“The various tips I give you in this book, believe me, have been *well tried* and *found correct*, or they would not be in this book. I have played them all, dozens of times running, and *produced perfect results*.”

Lord Tollemache

Up to now I have been considering the important but relatively unexciting subject of how to avoid errors. Part VI concerns situations in which by using a little imagination you can conjure peels out of nothing. In short, it is time to have some fun.

You should understand that these are practical situations and practical solutions. I have personally used most of them successfully in match play. Lacking Lord Tollemache's confidence I draw no conclusions from that. I cannot overemphasise the value of opportunism in croquet, particularly during peeling breaks. If I may, I shall give a couple of examples from my own matches. In Fig. 1.85 I was doing a straight peel at 4b. I had had R and was about to approach the hoop off U. The idea of cannoning R was unattractive whichever side of it I chose. The newish balls had plenty of pull and the outcome of the stroke was too uncertain. I was fortunate enough to notice that R was actually resting against the wire of the hoop. I took advantage of this by cannoning not R but the wire. I moved R a foot or so and was able to carry on peeling.



Fig. 1.85 (Y for 4b, the hoop shown, croqueting U)

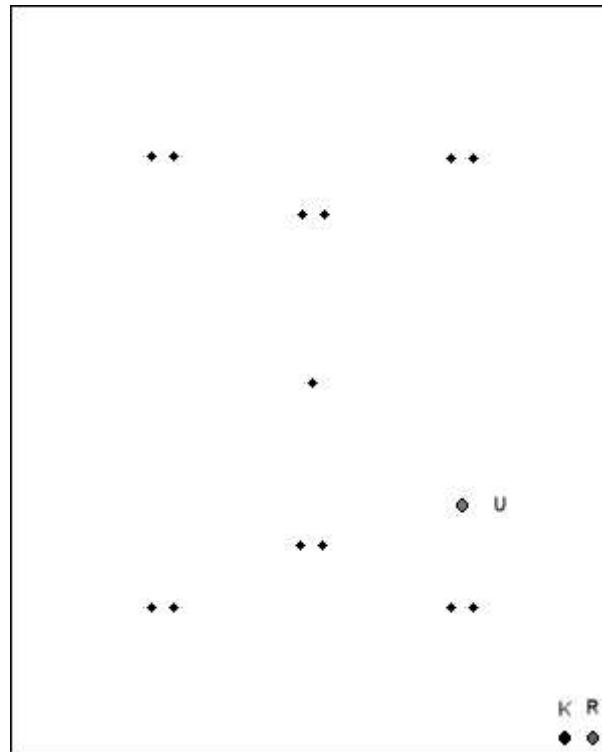
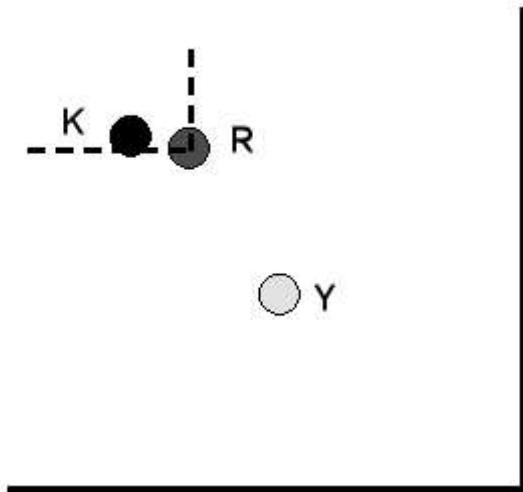
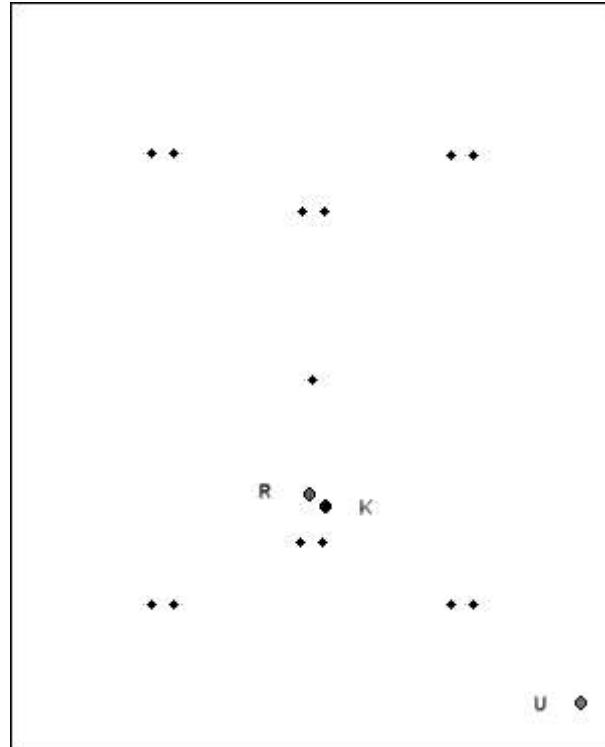


Fig. 1.86 (Y for 4, croqueting K; K for penult)

In Fig. 1.86, I had just made 3 and rushed K about a yard from R. I wanted to peg out K, which was for penult. It was my first break on an unfamiliar lawn so I wanted a decent rush on U to 4. I could not safely carry out my wish to send K to 6 after making 4 if I now left K where it lay. One solution might have been to roll K into the corner area, but my rush on R would then have sent it more or less along the yard-line and not as close to U as I wanted. My solution was to do a little pass roll sending K just short of R and an inch or so off the yard-line, as in Fig. 1.87. Now the rush (which was not as difficult as you may think) made R ricochet off K and go a little past U, getting K well away from the corner. I had nothing to lose by trying this improbable coup. If I had rolled K too short I should still have had my break, and only by a grossly bad stroke could I have sent it so hard that it seriously stymied R.

*Fig. 1.87 (detail of Fig. 1.86, one stroke later)**Fig. 1.88 (Y for 3b, croqueting R)*

After that it is only right that I should show you the other side of this particular coin. You should only go in for speculative tricks either if you have nothing to lose or if success will constitute a big enough coup to justify the risk. It is all too easy to overestimate the value of the coup and to underestimate the risk. In Fig. 1.88, R was already for the peg. I had just made 2b and incompetently rushed R too far. Yes, I know: you stop-shot R towards 4b - but I thought I knew better. K and R lay about a foot apart at such an angle that I could in one stroke send R to 4b and rush K near to U. Needless to say, the stroke was a complete flop and I broke down. I had no excuse. And it was in a Test Match ...

Most of the ideas in this Part call for a measure of flair. The positions which I discuss tend not to lend themselves to generalisation or categorisation, and book-learning will be of little use to you if you lack the flair to make use of it. Nearly all of the examples offer you a safe and useful resource, though I may not always explain why no risk is involved. You will generally need more skill to carry out what I suggest in this Part than I have previously assumed you to have.

Special tricks usually involve promotion cannons. So as to make some order out of a jumble of examples I shall list them in seven classes, identified by the balls involved:

Promoted ball

Peeled ball

Escape ball

Other ball

Croquetted ball

Escape/other ball

Peeled/other ball

Peeled/escape/other ball

1.VI.1 Promotion of peeled ball with escape ball

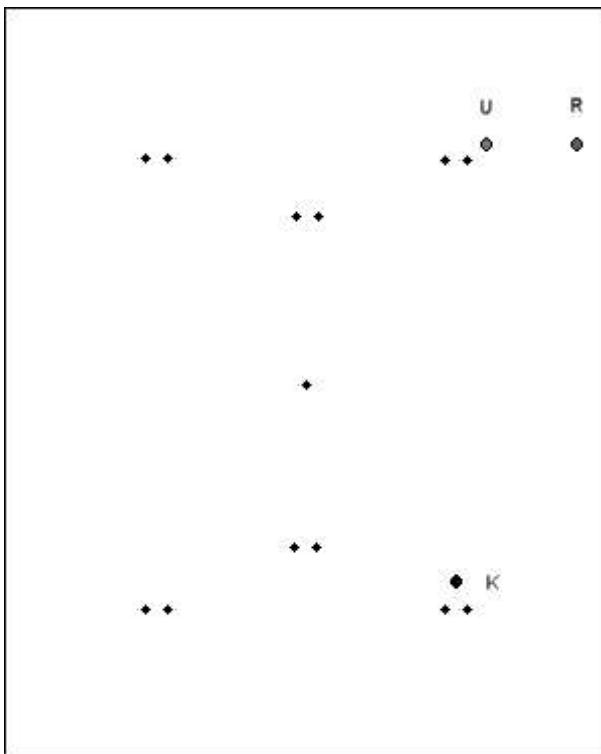


Fig. 1.89 (Yfor 3, croqueting R; R for 4b)

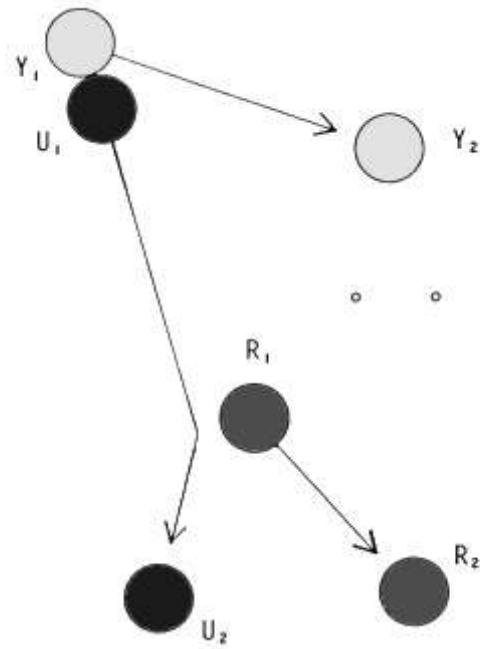


Fig. 1.90 (Yfor 3, cannoning R in front of 4b)

Fig. 1.89 shows a common situation. You have sent K to 4 and roqueted R, hoping to roll it in front of 4b to set up a standard triple. R then gets sent a little too far (say), but all is not lost: U is rushed past the hoop and is used to cannon R back into position (Fig. 1.90).

Many readers will be familiar with that idea, though perhaps not with the planning that may be needed. In Fig. 1.89 it is important to have U distinctly to one side of the hoop and preferably on the same side as R. Then if R goes short, U is roqueted softly; and if R goes too far, U is rushed across the face of the hoop. Now consider Fig. 1.91, showing the position earlier in the same break when Y has just run 1. Already it is clear how the triple must be set up. Rather than send U to a perfect position in front of 3, you should make a point of trying to send it a couple of yards or so East of it.

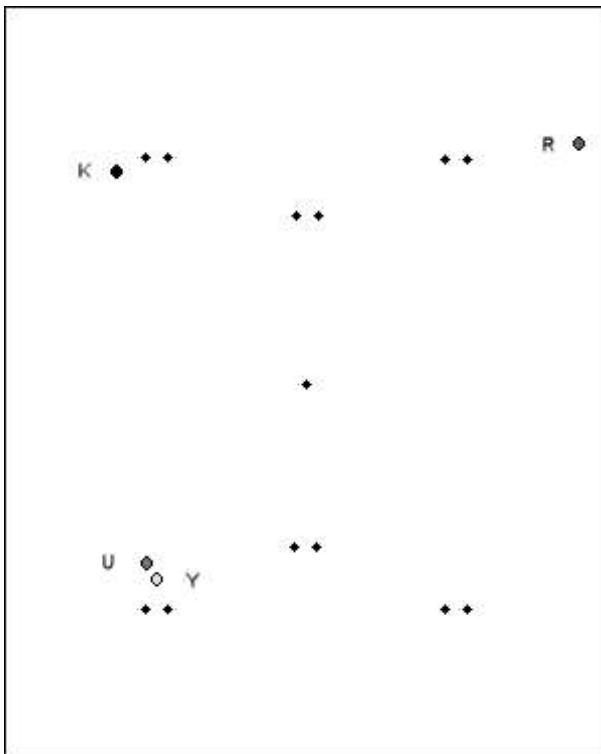


Fig. 1.91 (Y has just run 1, R for 4b)

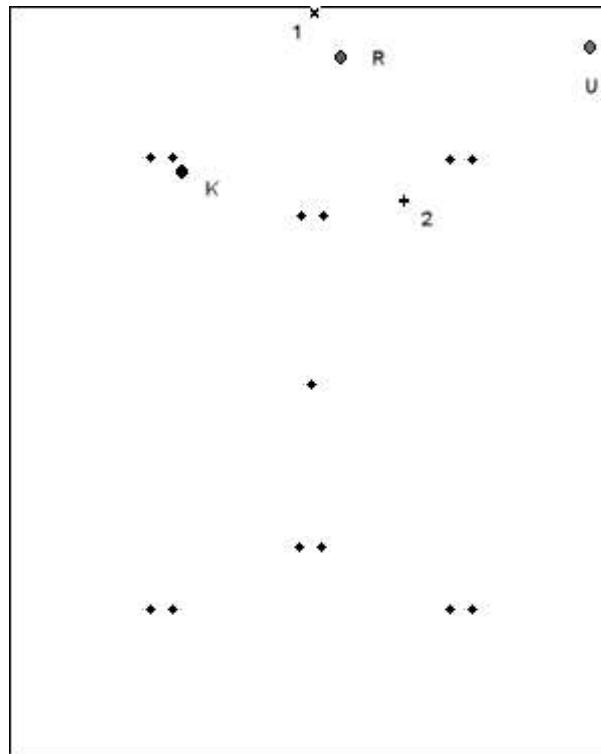


Fig. 1.92 (Yfor 2, croqueting K; R for 4b)

Fig. 1.92 shows a typically double-edged position. You are about to make 2 off K, R being for 4b. You still have some work to do to get a break, let alone a triple. As good a way of picking up a break as any is to rush K to the North boundary after making 2, to send it to 4 while going to U and then to take off to behind R.

Now here's the trick. Try to rush K across the boundary near spot (1). If you miss that small target, go back to the principal plan; but if you succeed, use K to cannon R nearer to 3 as you go to U. A substantial cannon is needed, but it does not have to be particularly accurate. Now U goes to 4, you make 3 off R and with any luck you will be able to peel immediately, using K as the escape ball. (Spot (2) is referred to later on.)

1.VI.2 Promotion of peeled ball with other ball

I need not write about the various nudges and cannon peels so often used in the course of straight peels. A more amusing example in this category is shown in Fig. 1.93. When the penult peel sticks during a three-ball triple you complete the peel with a cannon after making 1b, getting a rush on the peeled ball to 2b.

1.VI.3 Promotion of escape ball with peeled ball

In Fig. 1.94 you have made 2b off K and have then failed to position it properly for its intended role as escape ball after the penult peel. You rush R to near spot (1) and cannon K while going to U.

In Fig. 1.95 you are about to approach 3 off R, setting up a standard triple. Cannon U out of the way with R.

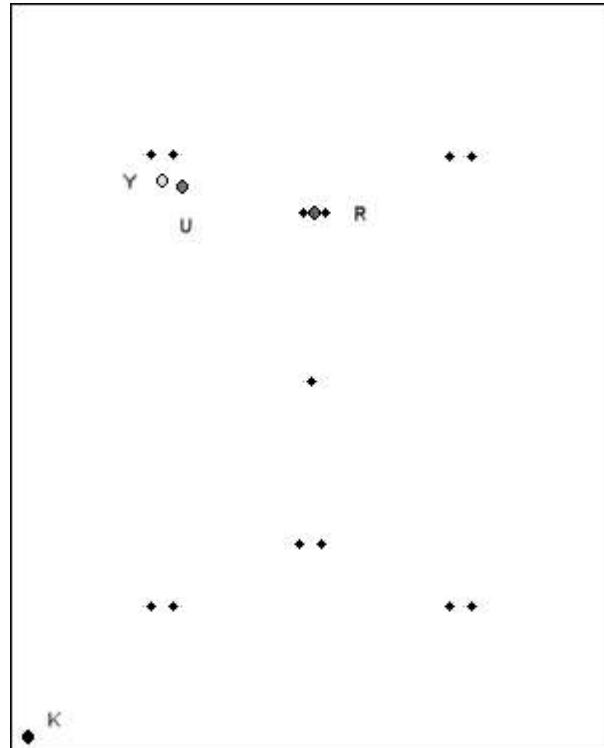


Fig. 1.93 (Y for 2b, R for penult)

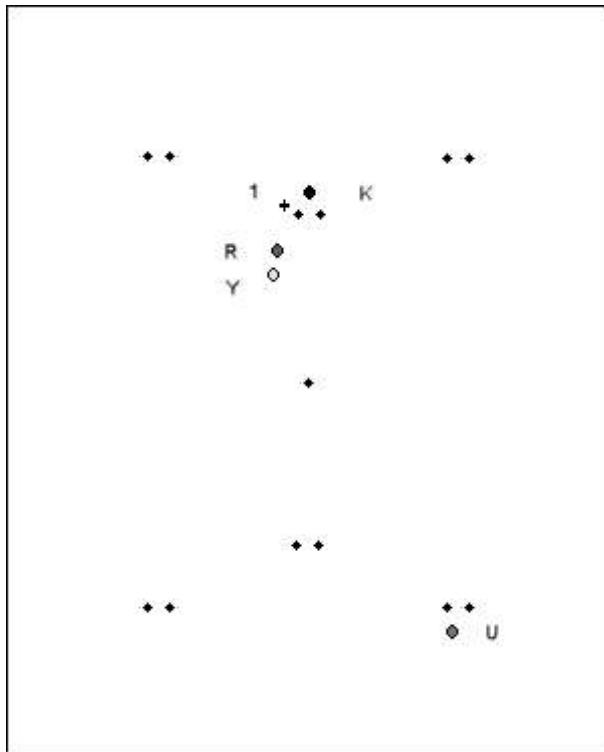


Fig. 1.94 (Y for 3b, R for penult)

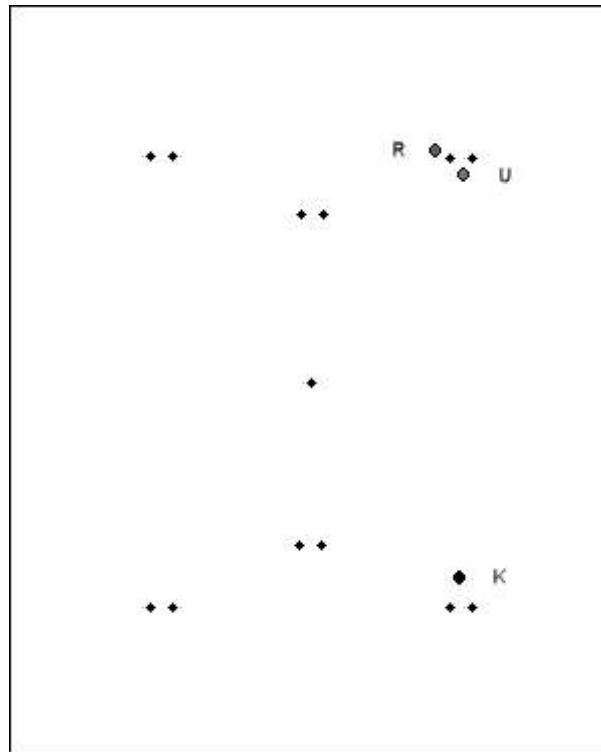


Fig. 1.95 (Y for 3, croqueting R; R for 4b)

1.VI.4 Promotion of escape ball with other ball

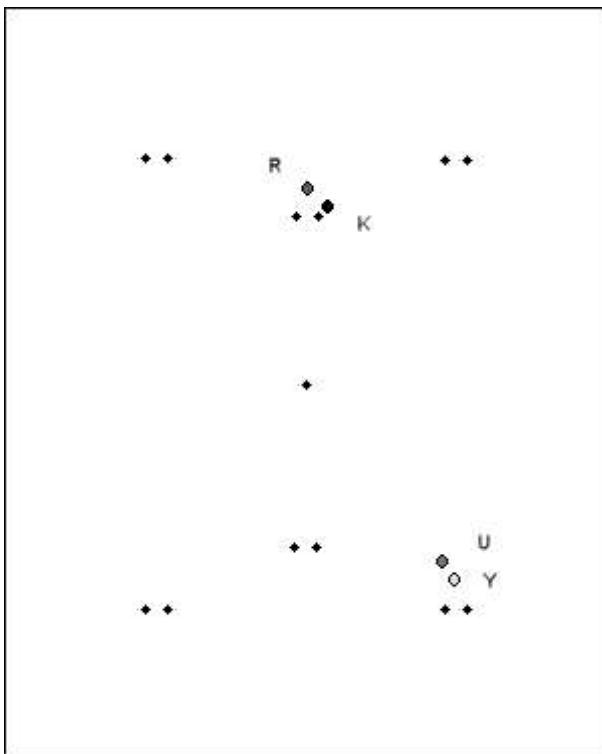


Fig. 1.96 (Y has just run 3b; R for penult)

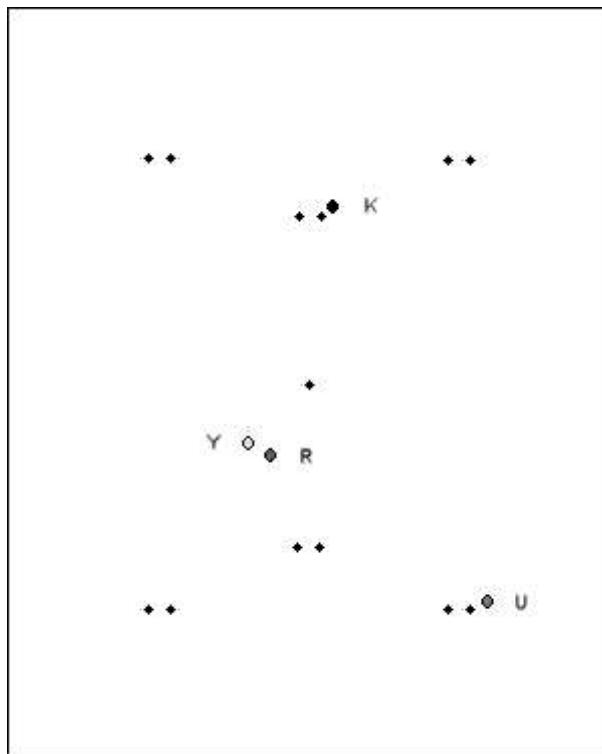


Fig. 1.97 (Y for 3b; R for penult)

In Fig. 1.96 you have just made 3b. R is for penult. You rush U down and cannon K into a more suitable escape position.

This is a good point at which to make a general comment which particularly applies to Fig. 1.96. I know perfectly well that in practice you are happy enough to get any old forward rush after 3b. So am I. Even if you got a dolly rush you would not always send it all that way with enough accuracy for you to cannon K. Nor should I. But that does not mean that my advice here is pure fantasy. The trouble is that most players have a mental block about this sort of position. It never occurs to them to try to rush U to a good cannoning position, and even if they do so by accident they do not always realise what has happened. As soon as you send K to that poor position after making 2b you should automatically see that there is a possible cannon. Take no risks to achieve it, but at least recognise the chance and try for it. The same applies if K is at spot (1): try to rush U near spot (2).

In Fig. 1.97 you have made 2b off K when R is for penult and have sent K to just the wrong spot, like K₁ in the previous example. Why wait for the Fig. 1.96 cannon? Cannon K straight away when you croquet R!

1.VI.5 Promotion of other ball with peeled ball

In Fig. 1.98 you are for 2b and R is for 4b. You failed to get a rush on U after 1b and unfortunately croqueted it into the peg. Now the only sound way of setting up the straight triple is to cannon U towards 3b with R. The same cannon can be used when R is for rover.

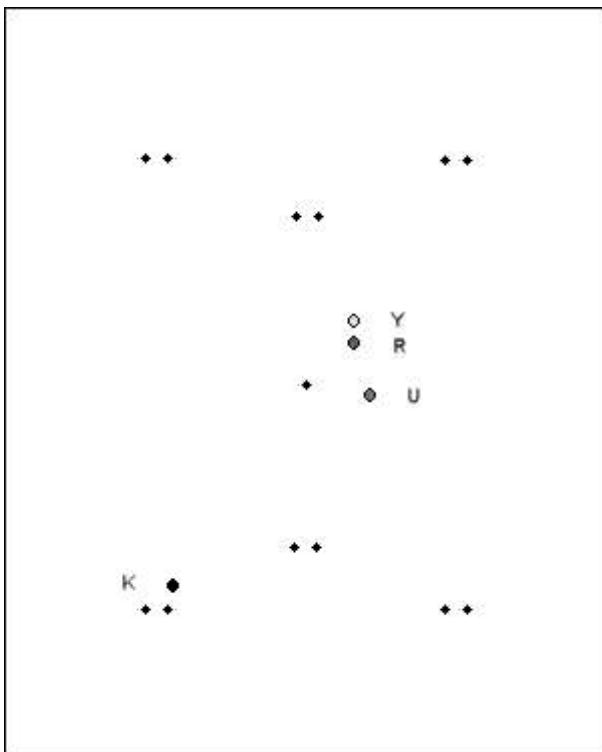


Fig. 1.98 (Y for 2b; R for 4b)

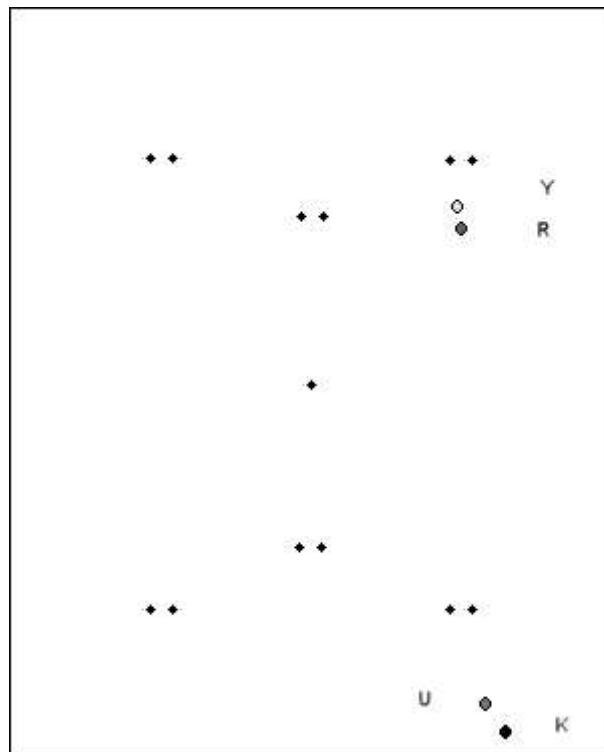


Fig. 1.5 (repeated) (Y has just run 3; R for 4b)

It is in this category that the solution to Problem 1.5 belongs. The only difficulty facing you is that you do not want to make 5 off R because you hope to peel it through penult after making 6.

You might leave R somewhere appropriate near the middle of the court, go to K and leave it on the non-playing side of 4, rush U to the East of 4 and approach 4 with a stop shot sending U to 5, but this manoeuvre is not to everyone's taste and has the serious disadvantage in this context of tending to give a rather poorly placed pioneer at 5. Alternatively you might send K to 5 after first rushing it towards the corner, but I for one should not feel happy about getting K to 5 and also getting a good rush on U to 4. If only U were a bit further into the court ...

Well, did you get it? From the diagrammed position you rush R behind U and use it to cannon U a little into the court before roqueting K. It is not vital to cannon U in any particular direction or even particularly hard, so there is a surprisingly large target area into which to aim your rush on R. It is about 8 feet wide, namely from 4 feet wide of K to 1 foot wide of U. You will probably not accept this on paper, so go out on the lawn and see for yourself. If you rush R outside the target area or straight into U, you still have the option of using one of the other two methods I first mentioned, quite apart from the safety play of sending R to 5.

This example is a good illustration of a principle underlying most of what I say in the Part. I have told you to do a 20-yard rush into a target area only 8 feet wide. You should try it not because you are likely to succeed, though I think you should, but because you lose nothing thereby. I have made the idea easy to accept by giving you a dolly rush. If Y and R were 5 feet apart, say, you might tell me that it was not worth trying the trick. If so, we should have to agree to differ.

1.VI.6 Promotion of other ball with escape ball

In Fig. 1.99 you have just run 5 and R is for 4b. K can be rushed neither to 6 nor to 1b. Had R been better placed you could have considered cannoning K and peeling before 6. As it is, you cannon K clear of the hoop leaving U as a later escape ball, roquet R and send it to 4b getting a rush on K to 6. (No, I had not forgotten the "in off" peel; but would we try that in a match?)

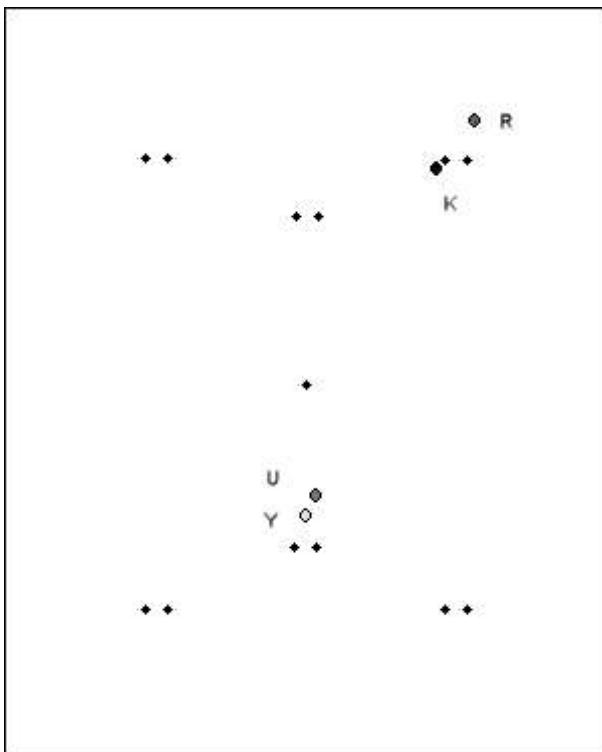


Fig. 1.99 (Y has just run 5; R for 4b)

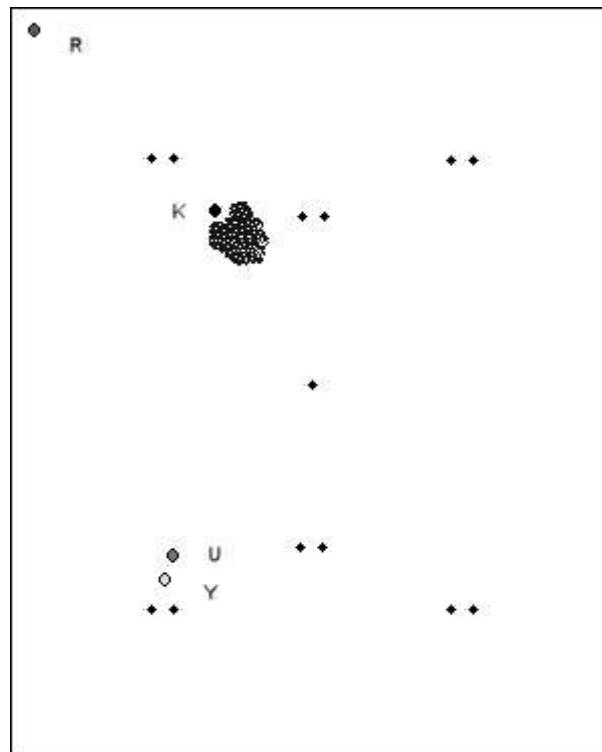


Fig. 1.100 (Y has just run 1; R for 4b)

1.VI.7 Promotion of other ball with other ball

R is for 4b in Fig. 1.100 and you have just made 1. You have a three-ball break and will probably have all four balls by the time you make 5. But is that good enough? Would you not rather get R out of the corner in time to set up a standard triple? The trouble is that you dare not send R to 3 with a split shot going to K, as K is so awkwardly placed as a pioneer. The solution is to rush U inside the dotted area and to cannon K as you go to R. Almost any substantial movement of K will be good enough. Since there is a danger that if you rush U too far to the right you may lose control even of the three-ball break, you should not try this trick unless you have a really easy rush after 1; and even then it is wise to aim the rush a little to the left of the centre of the dotted area to minimise the risk: see the section on targets and “spread” in Article 3. (Now turn back to Fig. 1.92. You will see how you could use the same trick there if R were not where it is shown but somewhere near spot (2).)

The solution to Problem 1.1 is much the same. K is too awkwardly placed for you to do a rush peel with the intention of then sending R to penult and getting a rush on K to 4b.

Furthermore, R is not sufficiently far into the jaws for you to set out to cannon it through with U. Therefore after making 3b you rush U just short of K and cannon it (almost anywhere will do), so that after the rush peel it is easier for you to get behind K.

Clearly, the rush on U might go well astray, and you might at first think that some possible places would be severely embarrassing: within an inch of K, for instance. You will find on inspection that there is no place to which you might reasonably expect to rush U which deprives you of the opportunity to switch to the Solomon variation of the straight triple, and you will generally also be able to switch to the simple straight triple. From some of those places you can sensibly attempt the immediate cannon peel. The reason why it is incorrect to rush U with the initial intention of cannon peeling R is that with R just outside the jaws of the hoop the target area for your rush on U is too small, and indeed a good deal of it is obscured by K. The target area when you propose to cannon K is really very large.

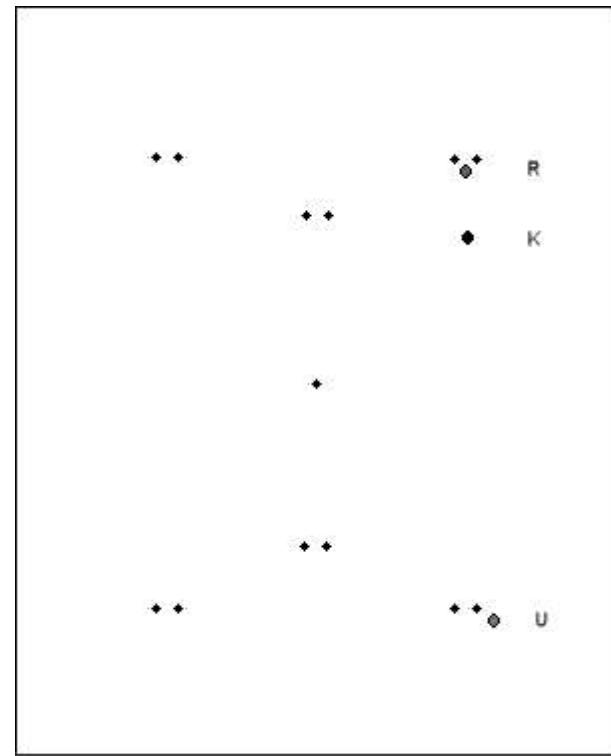


Fig. 1.1 (repeated) (Y for 1b, croqueting U; R for 4b)

1.VI.8 Some other cannons

In Fig. 1.101 you are for penult (the hoop shown) and are taking croquet from U. You have already had R, which is also for penult. K is at rover. If you cannon R away with U neither will you be likely to get another peel nor will you be able to leave U on the wire of penult. Instead you should do a take-off in which Y hits R gently just right of its centre. R is moved a few inches and you can run the hoop and either peel or jaws R or put U on the wire, according to your choice of leave.

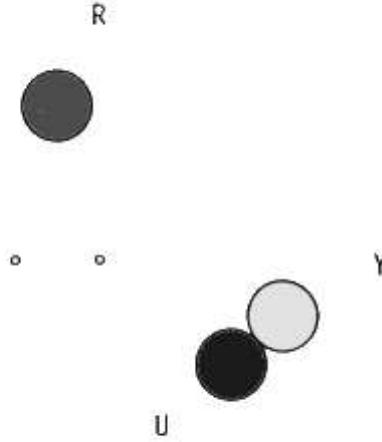


Fig. 1.101 (to scale) (Y for penult, having had R)

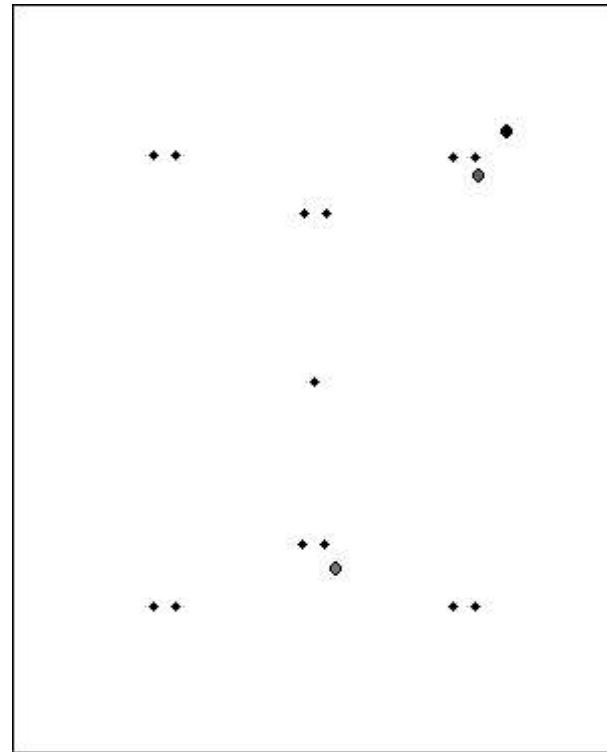


Fig. 1.102 (Y for 5, croqueting K; R for 4b)

Most cannons are promotion cannons. The previous one was not: it served the dual purpose of positioning Y and removing R. Nor for that matter was Fig. 1.95 where the aim was to remove U. Sometimes you use the cannon solely for the benefit of the croqueted ball. In Fig. 1.102 you are for 5. You have had R, which is for 4b, and are taking croquet from K. To set up the peel before 6 you do a pass roll cannoning K into R, with any luck stopping K in a satisfactory escape position. Never mind if it does not work: if you are competent at the pass roll to U you will have lost nothing by the attempt.

This is as good a place as any for me to give a deserved mention to a similar and better known trick. In Fig. 1.103 you are for 2 and are taking croquet from R. Do a pass roll to U, aiming to make R hit the third hoop and stay close by it.

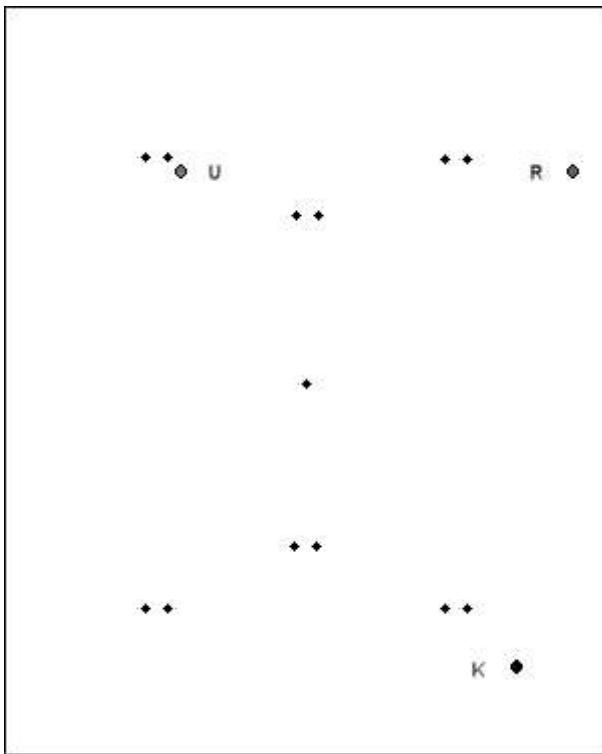


Fig. 1.103 (Y for 2, croqueting R)

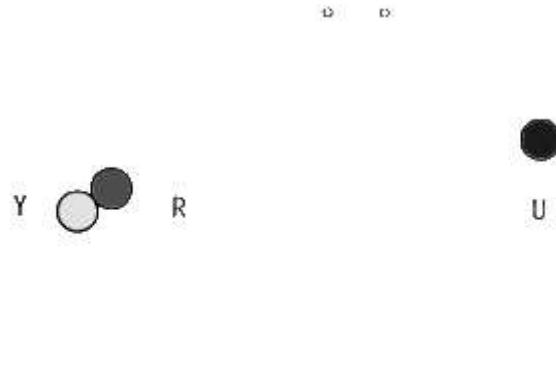


Fig. 1.104 (Y peeling R; U is the escape ball)

In Fig. 1.104 you want to peel R, but the angle is extreme. You do a roll of such weight that just after R hits the far wire Y catches it up and clips its right-hand side, sending it through the hoop. This “Aspinall peel” is worth trying only when you have an escape ball which you do not need to rush anywhere.

1.VI.9 Peeling two balls

When you are peeling an opponent with a view to pegging him out you will sometimes want to get in a few peels on your partner ball too. If you are up to this sort of thing you will not need much advice from me, but there is one tip which it took me a long time to discover. If you concentrate on peeling your opponent before turning to your partner ball you may find that the break is awkward and the peels few. You will generally have a smoother break and do more peels if you peel the balls more or less alternately.

Here is an example of an opportunity which I once missed through ignorance of this. My opponent broke down when for 3b with both U and K when I had not yet made a hoop. I was fortunate enough to reach the position in Fig. 1.105 when for 2, K by then being for 4b. What I then did was to carry on peeling K, through penult before 4 and through rover after 5. Very fancy, but I then had a most frustrating time and could manage to peel R only through 1 after making 2b.

From Fig. 1.105, I could have sent R to 1 after making 2. Then U goes to 4 and the peels slot into place: K through 4b before 3, R through 1 before 5, K not through but *into the jaws of penult* after 6, R through 2 after 1b, R through 3 after 4b and K peeled straight at rover.

As the game stood, my failure to peel R any further merely meant that I lost face. Had the clips been elsewhere it might have cost me the game.

1.VI.10 Faster and furiouser

There comes a point where one has to draw the line. There are further tricks, getting more and more obscure and extravagant. Sometimes after you yourself have run rover you want both to peel a ball through rover and to peg it out, which calls for a rush cannon. I leave such delights to a better pen than mine.

1.VI.11 Index to the Quiz

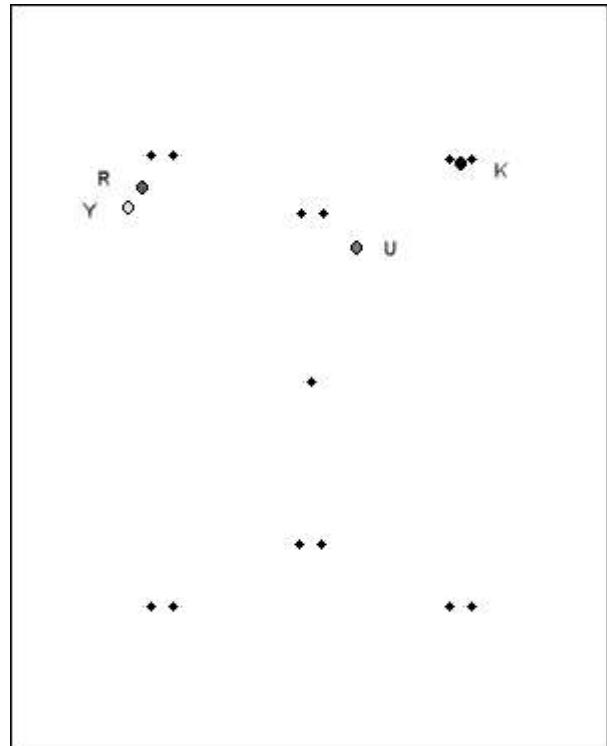


Fig. 1.105 (Y for 2; R for 1; K for 4b; U for 3b)

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