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How to Play

# Expert Croquet Tactics

## Article 3: Establishing a Break Style and Technique

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### Article 3: Establishing a Break

*There we are, with our first drinks of the evening, watching a Promising Newcomer in play.*

*"Can't think why he did that."*

*"Stupid thing to try."*

*"All he had to do was take off to Red and the break was in the bag."*

*"See, I said he'd break down."*

*So we go on, not always sotto voce. We are, of course, right. We wouldn't be watching otherwise. We cannot prove it, as the turn cannot be replayed. Nor can we readily characterise or expound the error, as the same position may never recur. So we do our honest, helpful best:-*

*"I wouldn't have done that."  
"Nor me."*

## Style and Technique

### Part I: Style

*"Blood is moost kyndely umour, answeringe to the love of God."*  
Wyclif

#### 3.I.1 The four humours

I now take a step back from concrete examples and consider some broad principles of how to get a break going. Many of the leading players have different break-building styles and I cannot say that such-and-such a way of building a break is "right" or "wrong". All the same, it will be found that the best styles can be seen as being composed of three identifiable components which I shall call "aggressive croquet", "precision croquet" and "canny croquet". Few players succeed in totally suppressing a fourth (unwanted) component, "Monte Carlo croquet". Any successful break-building style must draw on the first three components in proper proportion. In the course of one game you will at different times need to be bold, or stolid, or reserved and will at all times need to avoid caprice and bad temper. My four stylistic components are like the four humours, respectively blood, phlegm, melancholy and choler. A successful style resembles a well-balanced temperament.

Here is an example to illustrate the four components briefly. In Fig. 3.1 you have just run the first hoop and narrowly failed to rush Y into II. (In this Article you are RY, as before. You are usually playing with R.) Y is two feet from U. The other balls are still for the first hoop.

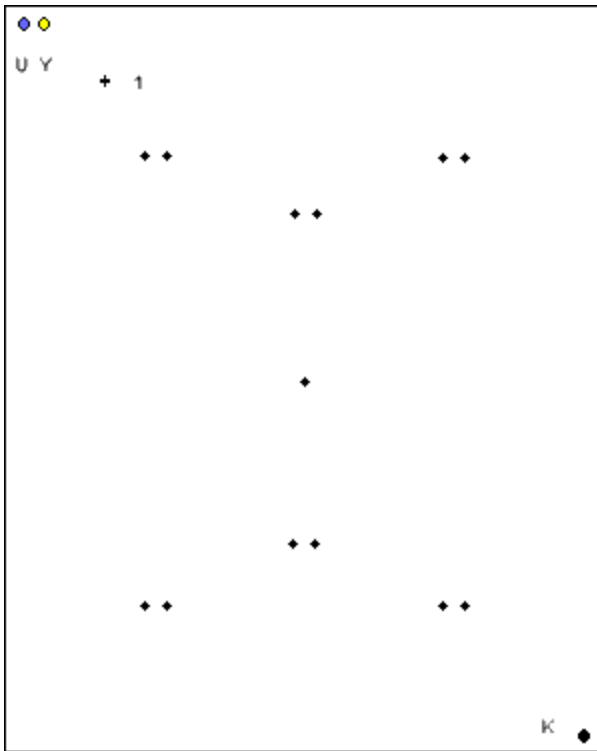


Fig. 3.1 (R for 2, croqueting Y; U, K, Y for 1)

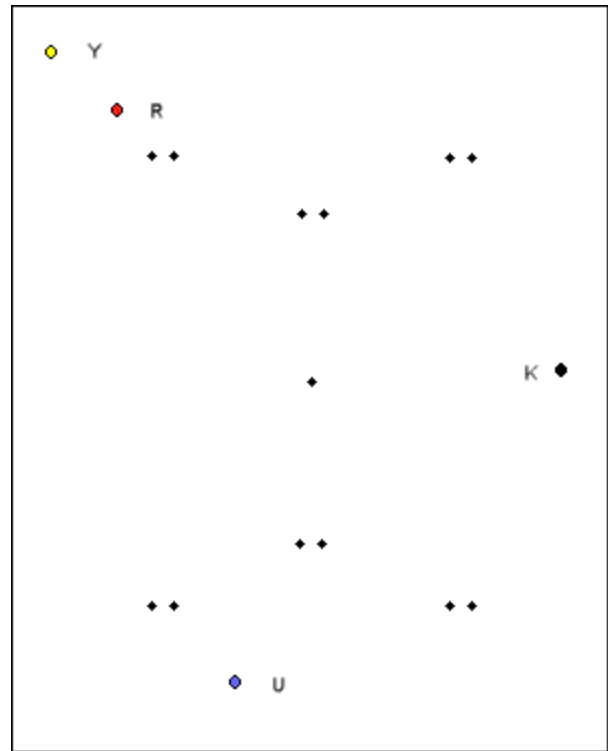


Fig. 3.2 ("Canny croquet" sequel to Fig. 3.1)

**Aggressive croquet:** You stop-shot Y to spot (1) and approach 2 off U sending U to 3. The break depends on one big stroke, but there is no serious gambling involved. If you do not get position you retreat behind Y with a rush to 2 to fight another day, leaving U no safe shot.

**Precision croquet:** You take off to behind U, make 2 off U, rush it back to II, stop-shot it out about 3 yards, rush Y accurately to 3 and after making 3 you rush Y to II, 4 or IV.

**Canny croquet:** Taking the view that there is not a good enough chance of picking up a break, you get behind U, rush it into the court, go to K, send K into the court and join up. There are several good leaves available, of which Fig. 3.2 is one.

**Monte Carlo croquet:** Now it is not you playing R, but Our Friend. He takes off to U, rushes it a little to the West of 2, stop-shots it 7 yards or so towards 3, runs 2 and shoots at Y. "All I have to do is hit a 5-yard shot and I have a break." Our Friend fails to see (a) that if he does not get position at 2 he has nowhere good to go with R; (b) that if he runs 2 and misses Y he leaves U a perfectly plausible 14-yard shot at what may well be a double target; and (c) that even if he hits Y he is going to be walking on egg shells while trying to make 3 with his "break". In short, he is putting the innings at risk at inadequate odds. "Never mind the odds. This is how I like to play. Why don't you go and watch some other match?"

### 3.I.2 Aggressive croquet

Most players who are destined to become good go through a phase of proto-aggressive croquet. Not having yet acquired the accuracy needed for precision croquet or the experience needed for canny croquet, they roll up to hoops from all over the court, take suicidal shots and infuriate their betters by beating them. These coltish tactics must be distinguished from aggressive croquet as played by the expert, though of course they have much in common. The colt uses his tactics because he has little choice. The expert plays aggressive croquet because he is good at it and he chooses to do so.

I cannot overemphasise the importance played by physical skill in aggressive croquet. If your chance of success with the split shot approach in Fig. 3.1 is only about 2 out of 10 (like that of most mortals) then you delude yourself by trying it and calling it “aggressive croquet”. If you fail, U finessees and you have lost your impetus. It does not pay you to try it unless you have the skill to succeed about 5 times in 10. Equally, you do not use aggressive croquet in Fig. 3.1 unless you have the skill to send U reasonably accurately to 3. If U goes short the potential shot at Y becomes a serious threat, and if U goes too far you have a nasty split shot after 2.

#### Further examples of aggressive croquet.

Fig. 3.3: R has just run 1 and rushed Y as well as he could. A pass roll to U and K sets up a four-ball break.

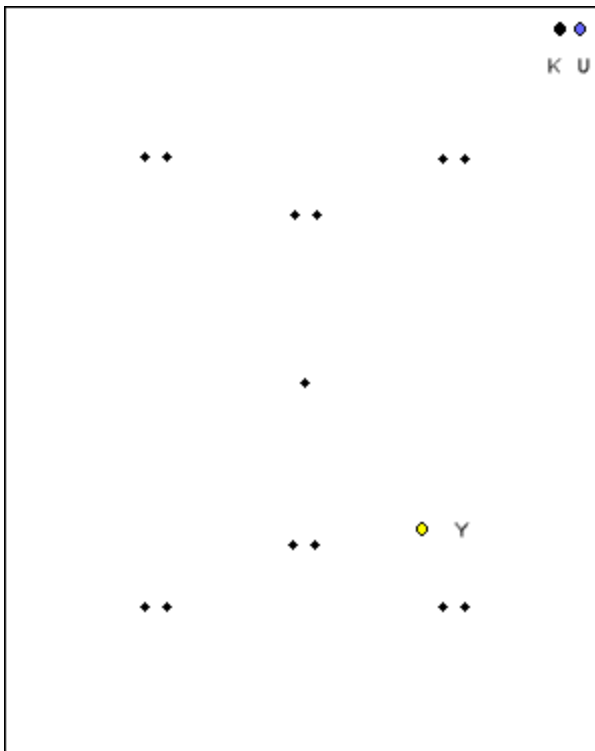


Fig. 3.3 (R for 2, croqueting Y)

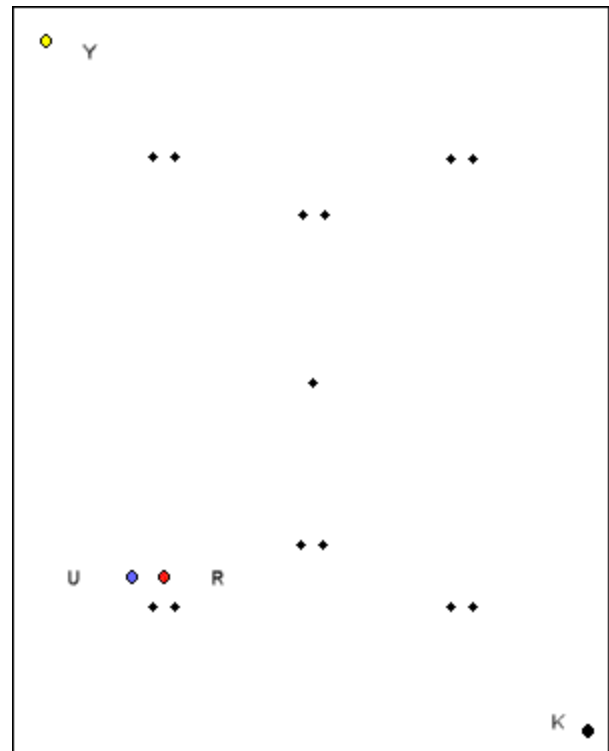


Fig. 3.4 (R has just run 1)

Fig. 3.4: R has just run 1. He roquets U and sends it to 3 going to Y. (Note that there are some good canny croquet alternatives open to R.)

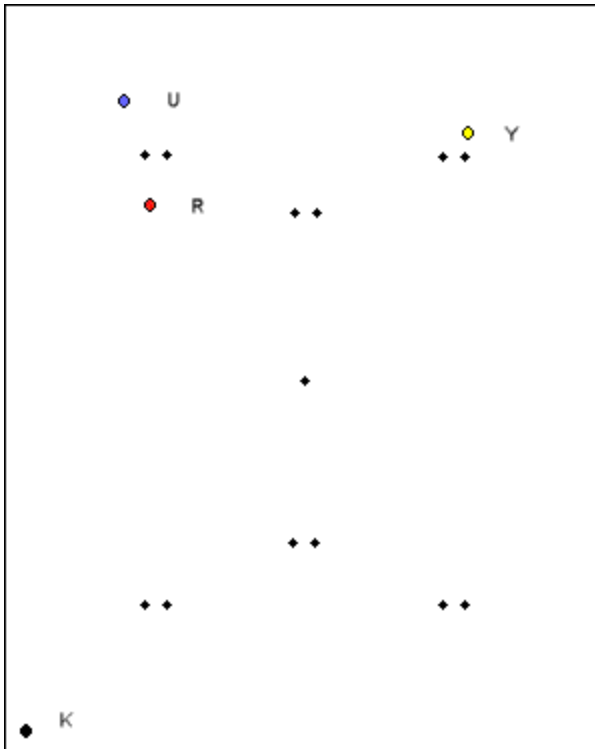


Fig. 3.5 (R for 2)

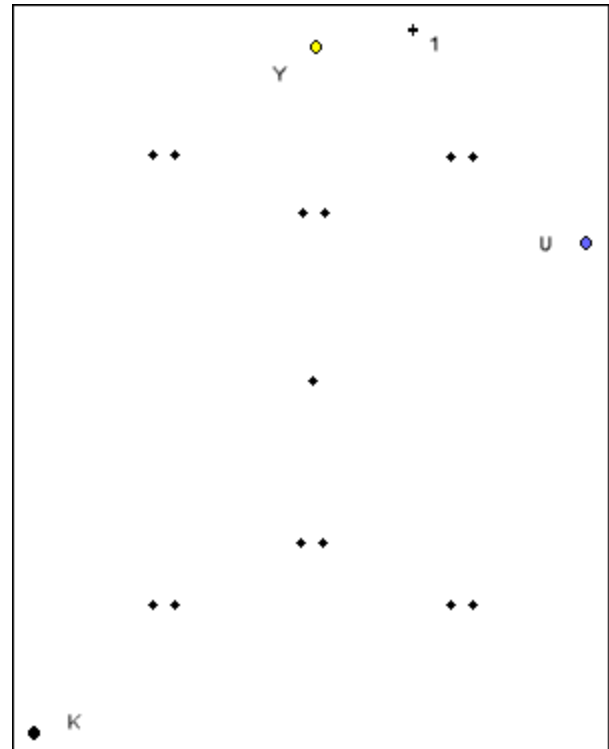


Fig. 3.6 (R for 4, croquetting U)

Fig. 3.5: U is for 1. R runs 2 hard from 3 yards.

Fig. 3.6: R made 3 and rushed Y but failed to get behind U (which had been at spot (1)) and has cut it as far as he can. He now rolls up to 4 and makes it, then rolls up to 5 sending U past the peg and runs 5 either to U or to Y on the North boundary. (This may seem very unsophisticated, but why not do it if you can? R has nothing better to do, and this sort of play wins matches. R can always join up if things do not work out. Cotter is said to have dismissed Freddie Stone's aggressive croquet as "not croquet": see Prichard's History at page 141. I once fell into similar error.)

It is a general characteristic of aggressive croquet that you pick up or significantly improve your break by means of one or at most two daring strokes. You need to stay cool if you are to play aggressive croquet successfully under pressure. You interrupt the methodical progress typical of most expert croquet to execute one hair-raising stroke and then ease back again into steady play. This emotional gear-change must be accomplished without fluster. The less you use aggressive croquet the more difficult it becomes.

It is sometimes described as unsophisticated. Certainly, those who rely on it too heavily run the risk of never acquiring the complementary skills of precision croquet and canny croquet without which it is difficult to reach the top. If you know only how to attack, your opponents will learn to take advantage of your limitations. Yet among experts hardly a game goes by without a situation that calls for aggressive croquet if the players are up to it.

### 3.1.3 Precision croquet

If you have a simple rush to your hoop from six yards away, you try to rush the ball to a perfect position in front of the hoop. If you are doing a three-ball break, you hope to get a rush after each hoop so as to avoid any difficult split shots. The better you are, the more control you have over these little things.

However, there is more to precision croquet than simply being good at the short game. You rarely pick up a break from "nothing" just by playing tidily. You must have such complete control over the short game that you turn it into a means of attack. The distinction between tidy play and precision croquet is not merely one of degree. Precision croquet calls for a particular attitude of mind which is perhaps summed up by Cotter (page 61):

"If I have a rush to my hoop and am playing well, I can go round, irrespective of where the opposing balls are."

(I have taken these words slightly out of context, as he goes on to describe some aggressive croquet; but I am confident that Cotter intended his remark to apply equally to precision croquet, which he could play to perfection.)

When you use precision croquet to pick up a break from "nothing" you play a sort of glorified two-ball break. After each hoop, instead of rushing to your next hoop, you get a good rush to a ball on or near the yard-line and then a *perfect* rush on it, in most instances leaving the croqueted ball a little further into the court. The basic philosophy is always to place the striker's ball (or, in a rush, the rushed ball) with the greatest possible accuracy. Every stroke is designed so as to make the next one as controlled as possible. You set yourself very high standards of accuracy. Some idea of the standards which Cotter

set himself, and by and large maintained, may be had from his account of the triple peel from the Fig. 3.7 position (page 82, colours transposed):

“Y cuts R a few yards into the court. I have one moderately difficult and one very difficult shot to do. Y sends R to 4-back getting a rush on U to 2. This is the moderately difficult shot. It is essential that the rush be accurately made, as it is not only the second hoop that is required but control as well. U is croqueted to the right of 2. Y runs the hoop with a perfect rush to 3 ... After running 3 and peeling R, Y must get a perfect rush on U to somewhere near the first corner.”

Solomon writes in similar terms (page 60). Cotter’s account does not quite illustrate pure precision croquet, in that he advocates rushing R only “a few yards into the court” at the outset. The stroke sending R to 4b and getting a rush on U smacks of aggressive croquet (a “moderately difficult shot”). The pure line would be to rush R just short of U and to send R in the direction of 4b (not necessarily all the way there) getting a dolly rush on U. The extra control which this gives you enables you to rush U accurately back to R after 2 and then to rush R accurately to 3. I return to this example, and to the question of whether “purer” is “better”, on page 109.

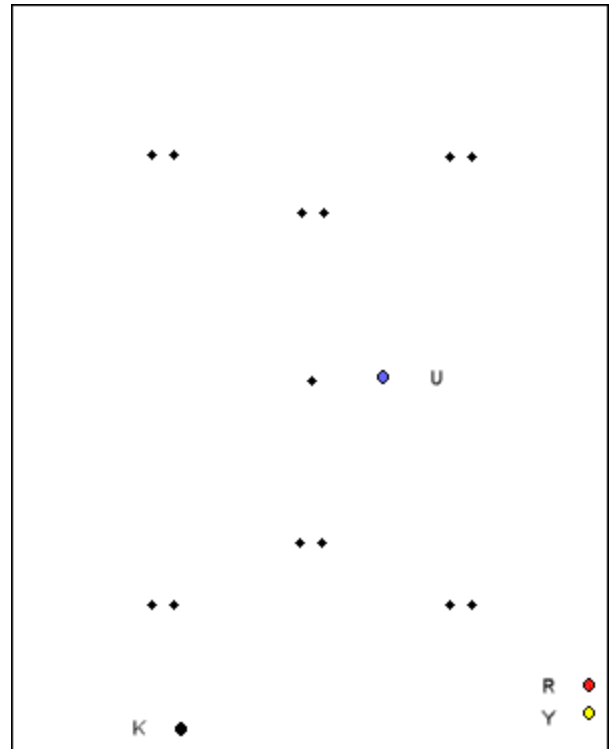


Fig. 3.7 (Y for 2; R for 4b)

Whereas aggressive croquet calls for rather a swashbuckling attitude, precision croquet calls for meticulous and painstaking attention to detail. (Those who watch professional snooker on television will see some points of similarity. The best players have not only the skill and flair for the long pots but also a grinding, machine-like accuracy when compiling a break.) The same self-confident drive is needed, but it is of a more patient nature. Your opponent may not think you have a break, but you *know* that you have; and in a few minutes you will prove it. Readers who have not seen such accuracy for themselves may doubt whether it is attainable. I can assure them that it is, though I have not seen it much in evidence in England since the early seventies. It is possible to be sure of going round from Fig. 3.8 (make 1, rush Y to K, rush K to U etc.); and in Fig. 3.9 to send Y into the corner area while getting the rush on U, confident of getting a corner cannon after the hoop; and in Fig. 3.10 (where R has just made 3b and rushed K) to send K out to such a spot that, after making 4b and rushing a ball back to III, there is an easy promotion cannon sending K to penult. (I discuss this idea in greater detail later on).

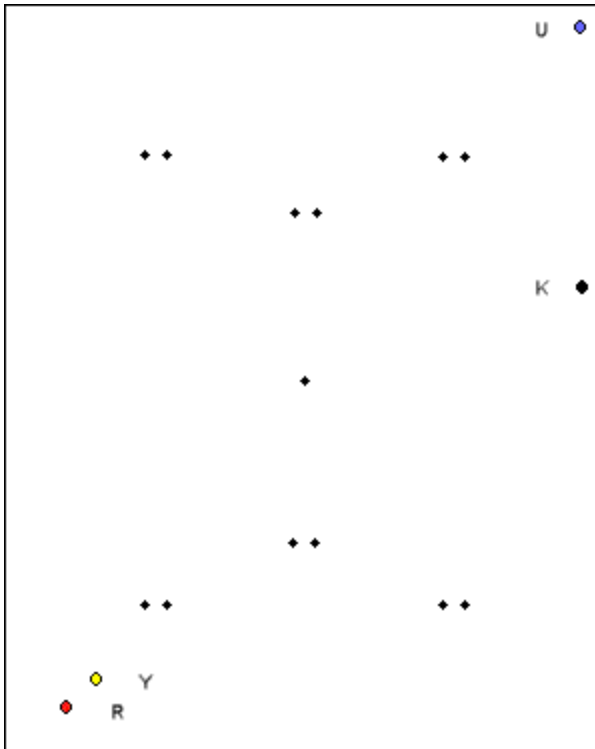


Fig. 3.8 (R for 1)

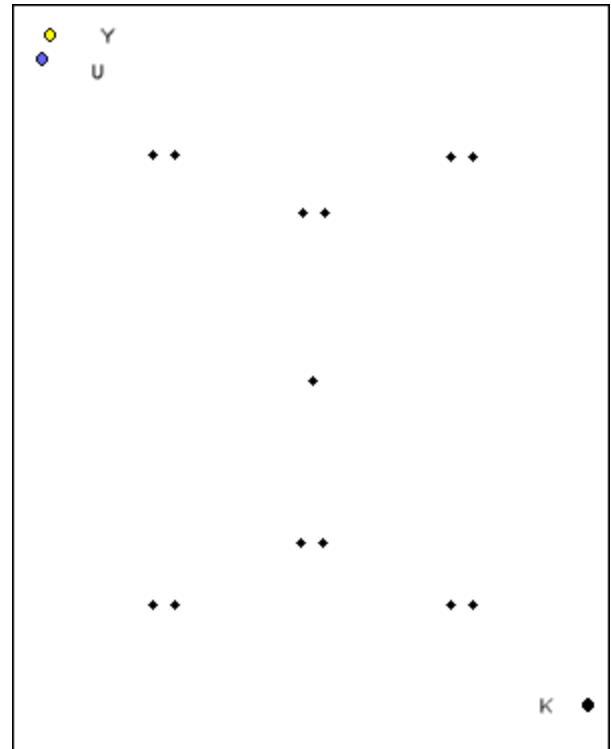


Fig. 3.9 (R for 2, croquetting Y)

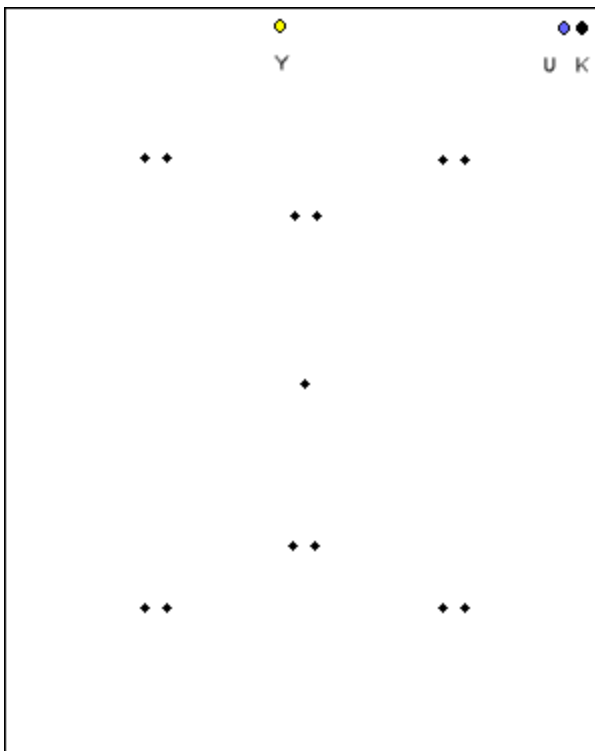


Fig. 3.10 (R for 4b, croquetting K)

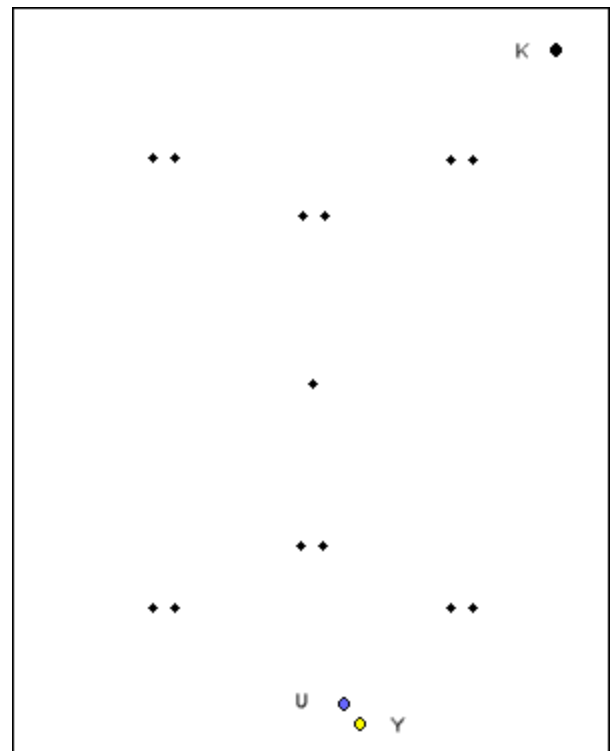


Fig. 3.11 (R for 1, croquetting Y)

Clearly, you should not make a fetish of precision croquet. You do not want your entire break to consist of long accurate rushes. The sooner you get all the balls into play the better. This might make you think that every time you rush a ball to the boundary you should send it out as far as possible while getting your next rush. That is not always the case. In Fig. 3.11 you are taking croquet from Y and are for the first hoop. U is two feet away. You *could* get Y perhaps 3 yards up the lawn if you sent it to the right of U; but the crux of the break is likely to be the rush of Y after the hoop, and it will not be particularly helpful to have Y that far out. The easiest way of getting a dolly rush is to keep Y no more than 2 yards from the yard-line and to rush U right behind it after you make 1. My personal preference would be to have Y only a yard from the yard-line, and I should croquet Y to the left of U to get it nearer to the first hoop. Who needs it near the fourth hoop?

On this point, you might like to reconsider the leave which I showed in Fig. 2.3, and which I reproduce as Fig. 3.12. If you put K four or five yards off the yard-line, which you can quite safely do, you make it unnecessarily difficult for Y to get a

perfect rush on K to 1 after rushing R to the boundary behind K; whereas there is no problem if K is only one or two yards in. Leaving K more or less out of the game not only helps your own break if U misses you, but may incidentally make it more difficult for him if he hits.

Too much precision croquet is just as bad for you as is too much aggressive croquet. Not only can it make you faint-hearted so that you fail to notice other, often safer, ways of setting up breaks because they need a little boldness, but by avoiding the particular strokes that aggressive croquet tends to involve you lose your ability to do them. That in turn makes you even less willing to use them.

This is shown in an amusing incident (which is admittedly of only anecdotal value) which in a way marked a watershed between precision croquet as it used to be practised in England and the more aggressive style which we now have. Solomon was playing Professor Neal in the Open Championship in 1972. Now no one could accuse Solomon of lacking either boldness or ability, but the received opinion of his day was that on the whole it was not a good idea to approach the first hoop from the first corner with your partner ball in the middle of the court. He would not choose to do so and (and this is the point) he reckoned that Neal would think the same. Solomon won the first game, but Neal had plenty of play and was playing well. Neal got round to 4b in the second game without peeling his partner ball through 1 and made the Old Standard Leave. Solomon lifted the ball at the peg and played it just outside the first corner. Neal rushed his partner ball to 3 and approached the first hoop from the first corner. Having made the hoop he had a standard triple laid out.

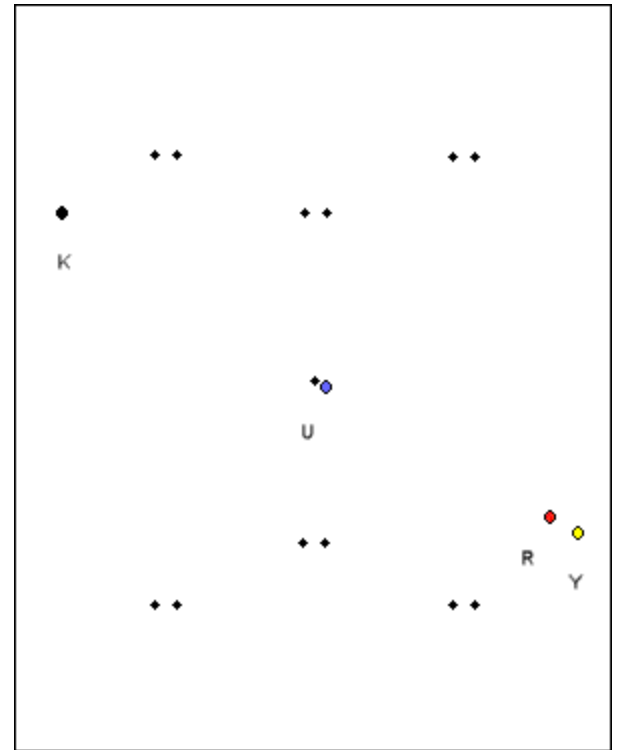


Fig. 3.12 (Y for 1; R for 4b: same as Fig. 2.3)

Well, fair enough. Solomon had made innumerable opponents look chumps by doing this sort of thing himself. But in the final game Neal once more went round to 4b with the same leave; once more Solomon played outside the first corner; and once more Neal approached the first hoop from the corner and did a triple peel. Precision croquet had met aggressive croquet and had failed to recognise it. Neal was *good* at that stroke. But who am I to say that I should not have done the same as Solomon?

### 3.1.4 Canny croquet

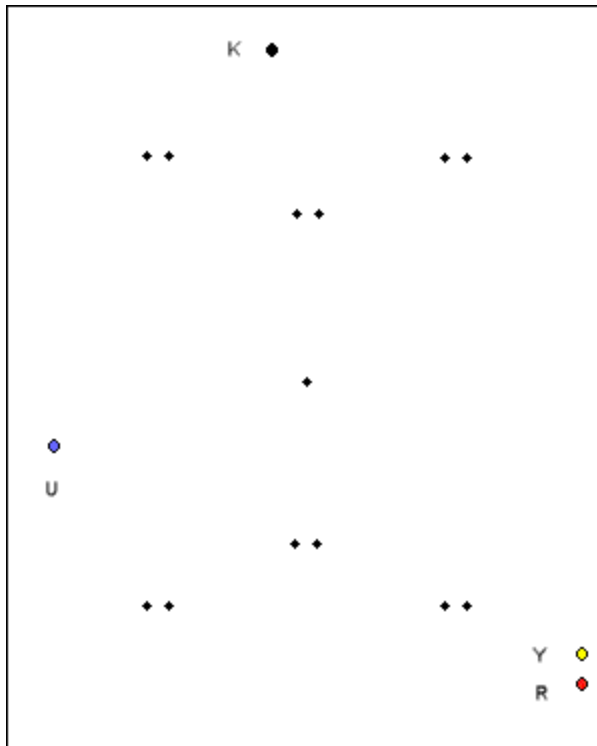


Fig. 3.13 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

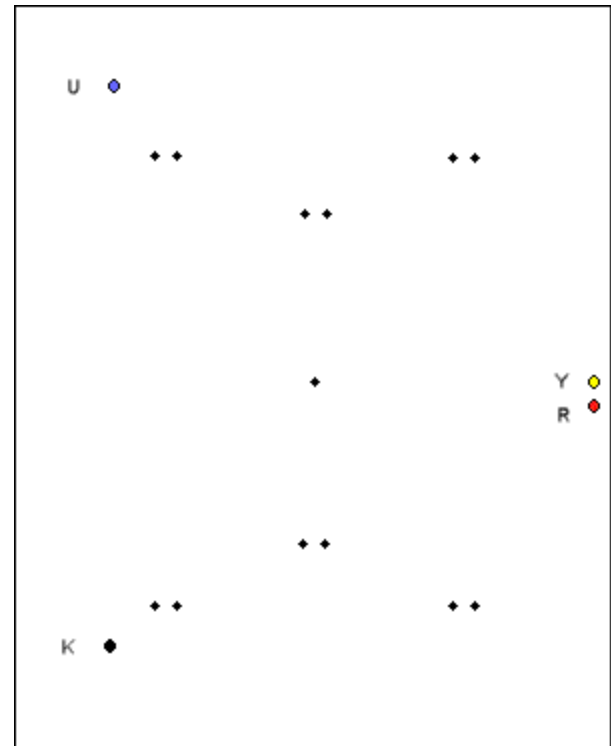


Fig. 3.14 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

Figs. 3.13 and 3.14 show two typical positions in which on an easy court UK cannot shoot without giving quite an easy break if he misses, but in which by finessing he leaves almost nothing for RY. Leaves like this are quite easy to make. Those

like Fig. 3.13 are at their best when U and K are between one and two yards off the yard-line, and those like Fig. 3.14 when they are about 3 yards in. It is generally easy for RY to make no attempt at a break after UK has finessed but to make another leave of a similar type. Defensive tactics like this can at their worst develop into a sort of expert Aunt Emma. At their best they can be used to give yourself a short knock-up and as a springboard from which to launch a break without conceding a shot.

Fig. 3.15 shows a position in which UK cannot afford to shoot and miss if RY is playing reasonably well. If UK does not shoot, what else can he do? [U to II], [U to III] and [K to III] are possible, but after [U to II] or [U to III] RY will get a break if he makes a good rush to 1 and after [K to III] RY has excellent prospects if he does a good cut rush to U.

Has RY made a good leave? Its effect is to make it reasonably likely that UK will shoot, preferring to go down fighting. RY might have done better to have left a rush towards III (Fig. 3.13), offering [U to I], [U to II] and [K to II] as plausible replies.

This example demonstrates the essence of canny croquet. You have to judge the leave carefully so that you persuade UK to finesse but yet leave yourself a chance of a break. At the same time it is important that you have a fairly easy break if UK shoots and misses, for if not you are simply giving UK a free shot.

That balancing act is very difficult if your opponent has an accurate perception of your ability. One way of persuading UK to finesse is to make use of your knowledge of his ability by leaving a position from which he himself would not get a break if he hit. Fig. 3.16 shows a position with variations, one of which might be successful in a particular match where the others would not.

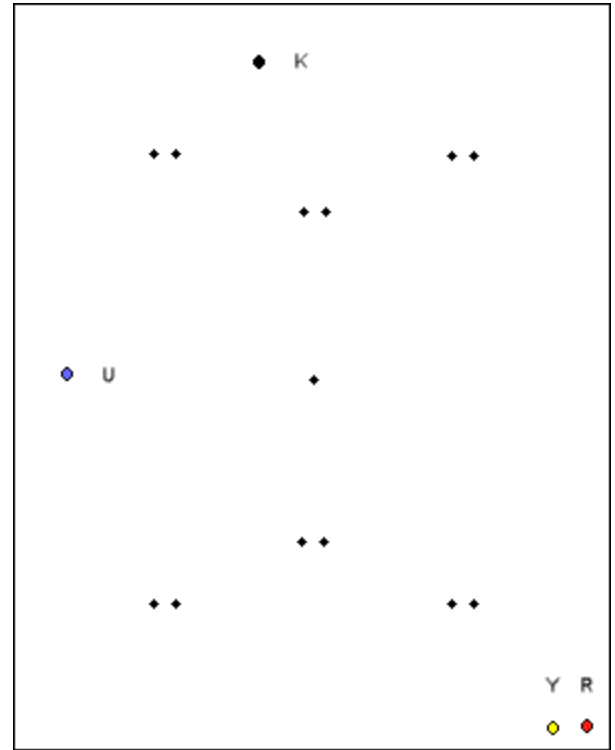


Fig. 3.15 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

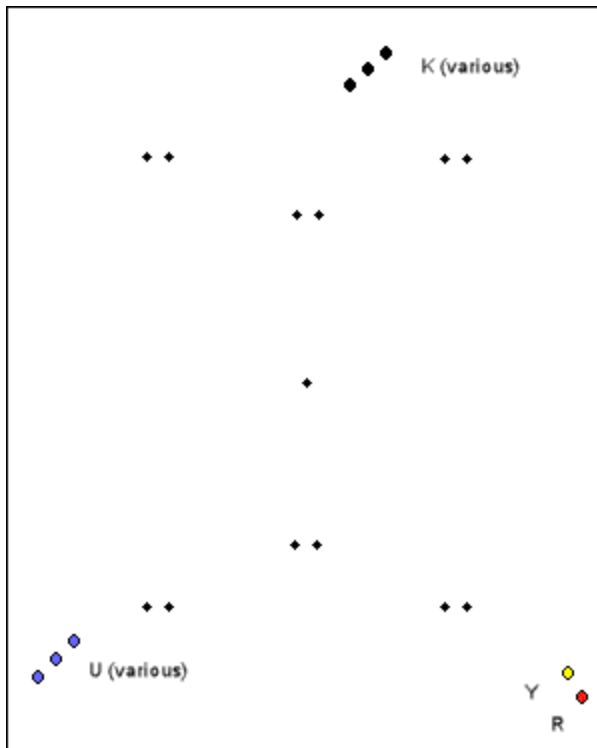


Fig. 3.16 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

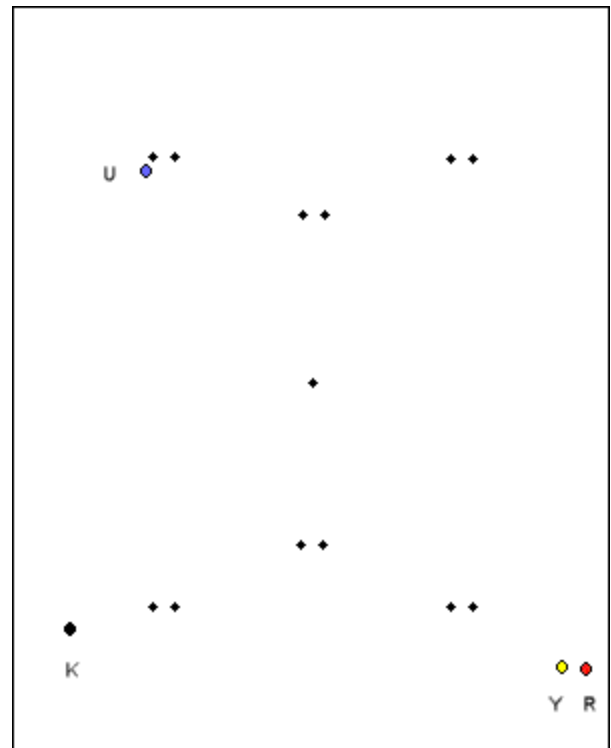


Fig. 3.17 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

If the standard of the players is so high that a canny leave will be ineffective, you might as well face up to it. You then have two alternatives, either to leave all the balls on or near the yard-line so that UK has work to do if he hits, or to leave yourself an out-and-out laid break. Fig. 3.17 shows a leave which the A class player is generally advised not to do, as it forces K to shoot at Y. All the same, if UK is going to shoot anyway and is sufficiently able to pick up a difficult break, you simply make



work for yourself if you make a super-defensive leave. Why not give yourself a little jam? When all is said and done, the odds are against UK hitting.

Sometimes you should use canny croquet even though it may give UK a shot, simply because you have no better plan. My initial exposition of the four stylistic components was in a sense an example of that, because if you thought it wisest not to try the second hoop you could by no means guarantee as effective a leave as that shown in Fig. 3.2 and might well have given UK a plausible shot.

It is a mistake to think that just because you have the innings you ought to be able to get a break without conceding UK any worthwhile shot. Sometimes you can indeed achieve that by your own brilliance, but often enough you “earn” the break by submitting to the shot. You should not necessarily mind if UK chooses to shoot. Just in case UK does hit you should, where possible, leave both your balls on the yard-line.

A feature of good canny croquet leaves is that U and K are generally only a little way off the yard-line. In Fig. 3.18 you have had Y and K and are about to send U near to 2, intending to lay up. To send U South of 2 is silly, because if K shoots at U and misses you will not necessarily get a break; but if you place U 3 yards off the North yard-line, any missed shot by UK will be easy to punish.

Another general feature of canny croquet at the beginning of the game is that you should try to control corner IV, either by being in it (Fig. 3.13) or by having a rush to it (Fig. 3.14). Leaves like Fig. 3.19 should be avoided: UK can usually play [U to I], [K to IV] or even [U at K]. Leaves like Fig. 3.20 are extremely tempting, but you can get into a real mess if UK plays either ball into IV and you fail to get a good rush after 1.

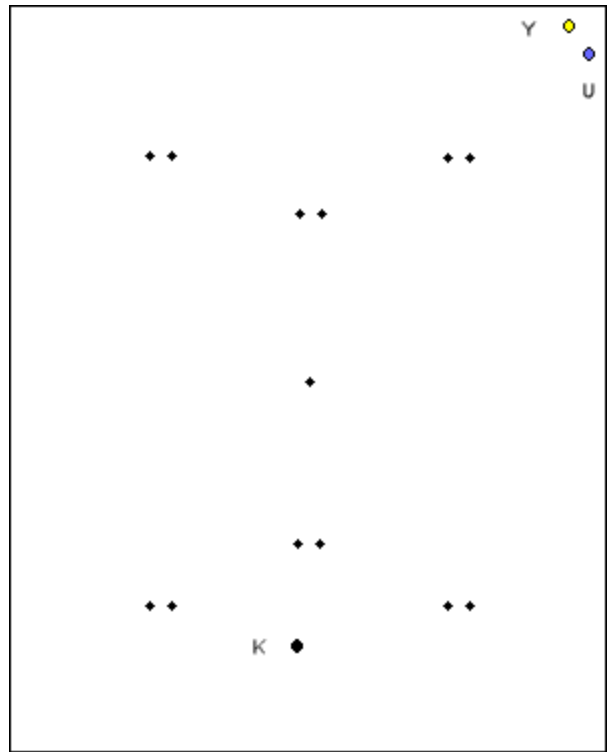


Fig. 3.18 (R croquetting U, having had Y and K)

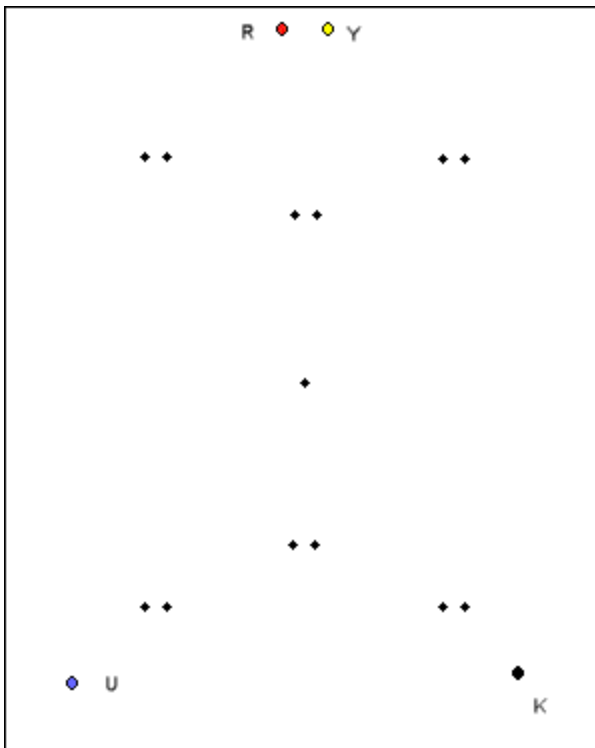


Fig. 3.19 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

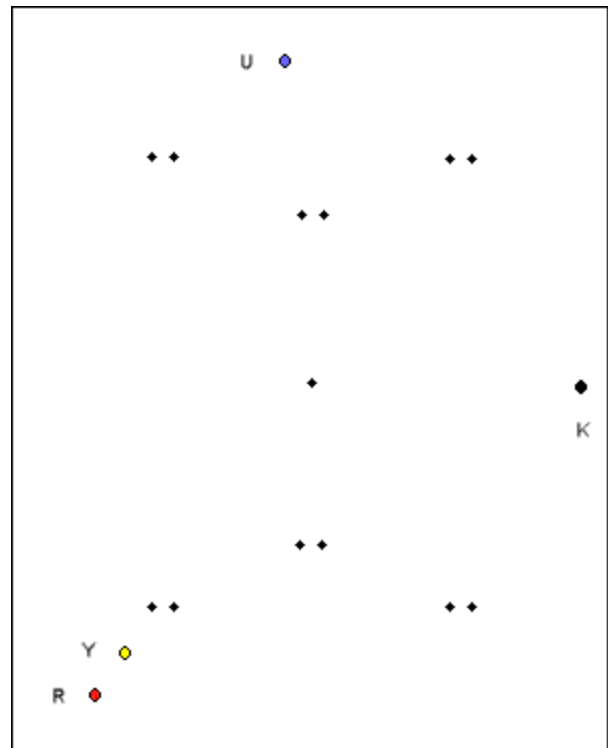
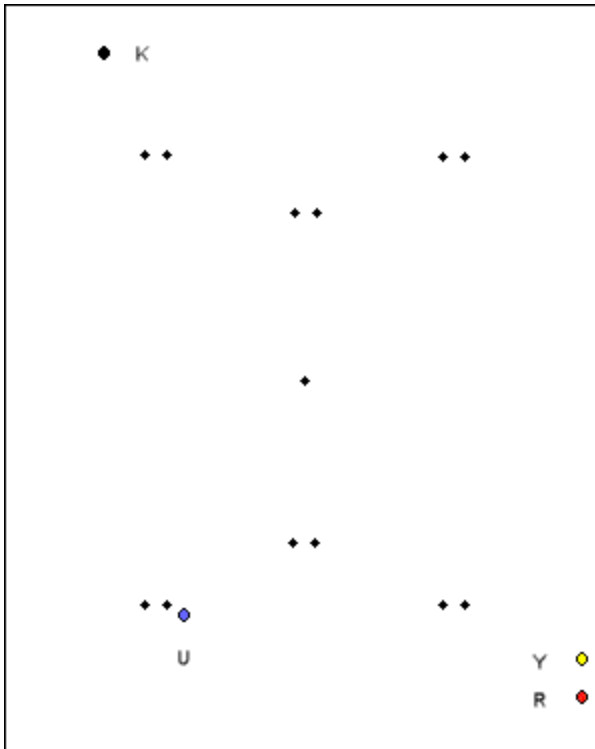
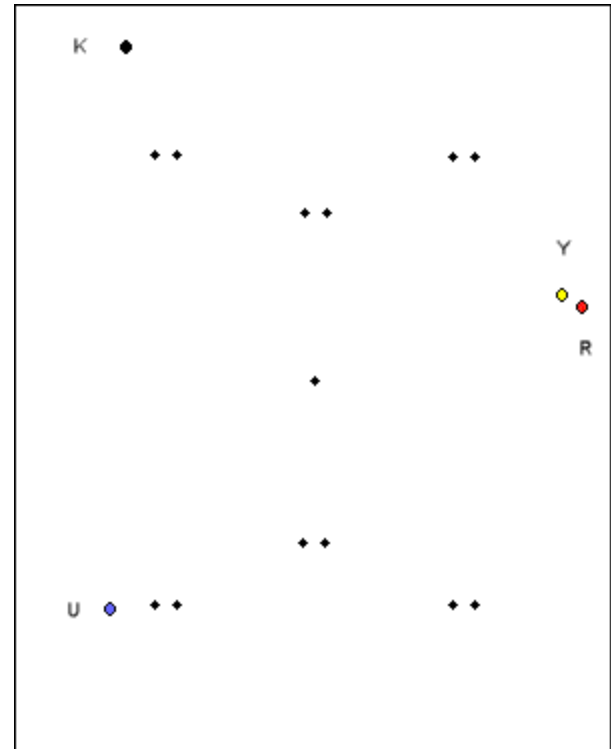


Fig. 3.20 (all balls for 1; UK to play)

Canny croquet gives substantial scope for the use of bluff. By subtle hints you can disguise how well you are playing and beguile UK into a rash shot or an unnecessary finesse. I am absolutely hopeless at bluffing, but even so my opponents have to guess and sometimes they guess wrong. When playing well I am left easy breaks after my opponent finesses, and when playing badly I am given breaks I ought not to have had because of an unnecessarily taken shot.



*Fig. 3.21 (all balls for 1; UK to play)*



*Fig. 3.22 (sequel to Fig. 3.21 after [U to III])*

Here is an interesting example of giving your opponent an opportunity to make the wrong decision. In Fig. 3.21 it is very tempting for UK to play the “obvious” [U to III]; but if he does that, you have no difficulty in setting up Fig. 3.22 and suddenly UK *has* to hit.

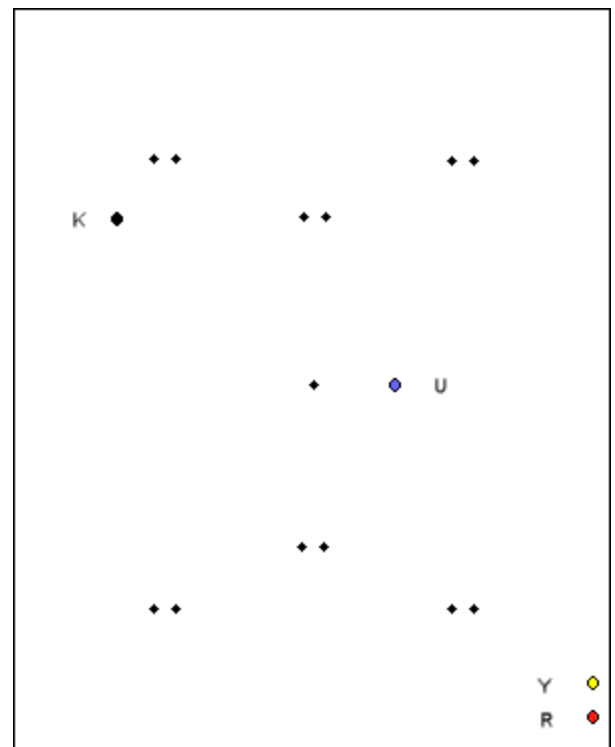
Of the three components of good style, it is canny croquet that is the most dangerous in excess. One slight slip gives your opponent a free shot or a double target. To spend too much time marching and countermarching is dispiriting. You simply have to attack sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

### 3.1.5 Discouraging the shot: a digression

In the last section I have been mainly discussing how to discourage your opponent from taking a shot. The art is a subtle one which depends on many factors. What I have been saying in the context of establishing a break is of general application, and is particularly important at the end of a break: when you are conceding a lift. As the principles are the same I shall not deal specifically with this situation, but it does raise one interesting question. One of the factors to which I have referred is the extent to which you avoid making your next turn too easy, for example by not leaving a rush to anywhere useful: compare Figs. 3.13 and 3.15. Sometimes this factor can be considered in isolation. A striking instance is the self-denying ploy known as the “reverse rush” originated by Humphrey Hicks, in which you deliberately give your backward ball a rush to nowhere. The use of this in the context of the OSL (Fig. 3.23) is an attempt to dissuade UK from taking the short shot.

This variation of the OSL makes no difference whatsoever to the length of any shot, no difference whatsoever if UK hits in and only an ignorably small difference if UK misses the short shot. It follows that, unusually, there is only one thing to consider, namely the fact that if UK finesses or misses the long shot RY finds himself with a much more difficult turn as a result of having left the reverse rush.

If RY and UK were not men but machines, the reverse rush would be fatuous. It is always open to UK to make the same choice of shot as he would have done had there been no reverse rush. If UK makes that choice the reverse rush will have



*Fig. 3.23 (4b leave; Y (sic) for 2; R for 4b)*

given RY no advantage when the choice is the short shot and will have given UK a significant advantage when the choice is the long shot or a finesse. Do the humanity, imperfection and frailty of RY and UK give the reverse rush a practical value which in theory it cannot have?

I wrote an article on this subject in the Australian Croquet Gazette (No. 3 of 1984), prompted by the repeated use of the reverse rush at first string by Neil Spooner (Australia) against John Prince (New Zealand) in the 1982 Sydney test match. The players' replies to my article were also published. Spooner said, in effect, that the reverse rush creates psychological problems even for the best players in the world. Prince tended to agree with him, and mentioned the element of bluff. (Hicks, though, wrote to me saying that he thought the reverse rush no longer playable.)

Suppose that UK is an excellent shot but is too timid. His best tactics after the OSL would probably be to take the short shot, but his timidity might make him hesitate. Such a player might be persuaded to take the long shot, wrongly, if RY laid a reverse rush. Alternatively, if UK is of a nervous disposition, he might take the short shot more anxiously after the reverse rush because there is then more at stake. That anxiety might make him shoot less well.

In either situation it might pay RY to use the reverse rush, but only if he is correct in considering UK to be weak in the heart or weak in the head.

When playing croquet it is essential to play the man and not the position, but I regard it as unwise to use tactics which presuppose that your opponent is going to do the wrong thing. Consequently, though outnumbered, I remain unconvinced by the reverse rush. I should never use it against any player who had read and understood this digression. (By way of further digression, a similar line of reasoning establishes that in the OSL you should often leave a rush into the lawn. This was once much frowned upon "because it forces the opponent to shoot".)

If the value of the reverse rush, as simple a subject for objective analysis as one could hope for, is open to dispute, how much less clearly can one make any general statement about the value of degrading a position in order to discourage the opponent from shooting. I personally should support the proposition that you should never choose a variation of a position whose sole effect is to worsen it for yourself. I should go on to say that where a possible variation involves several factors one of which is deliberate degradation, you should assess it on the basis that the element of degradation is not advantageous.

Can one apply this reasoning to canny croquet generally? One might say that in Fig. 3.13 one should try to leave a rush to K if possible. One might go further and attempt to discredit the entire philosophy underlying canny croquet. That I am all too aware of this will be evident from the top of page 101. The theoretical debate on this topic is still in its infancy. As a matter of practical experience I have found canny croquet as I have described it to be entirely sound.

### 3.I.6 Monte Carlo croquet

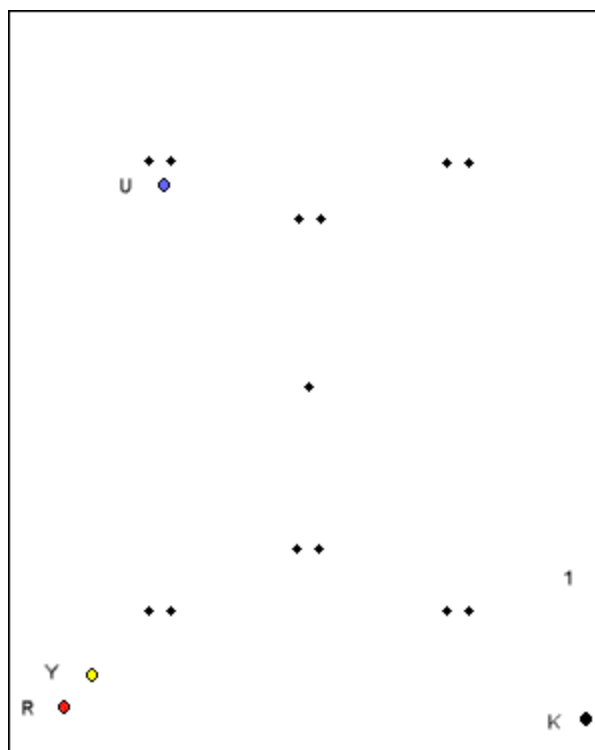
Even the best players make tactical mistakes, but not every tactical mistake is "Monte Carlo". Monte Carlo croquet is characterised by a rush of blood to the head or by habitual employment of a patently inferior manoeuvre. An example occurred in a 1982 test match, where in a pegged-out game with plenty of play left in it the single-ball player took a 30-yard shot at a single target which would have conceded an easy 3-ball break if it had missed. (In fact it hit!) Examples of patently inferior manoeuvres are (a) the taking of the short lift shot when you know you are shooting badly and (b) the variation of the standard triple to which I referred on page 17. Other examples of Monte Carlo croquet can be cheaply had by taking any instance of purported aggressive croquet where the player is simply not skilful enough.

You usually know when you have done something rash, even though you may attempt some lame rationalisation. "He was going round next turn anyway." How often we have all heard that!

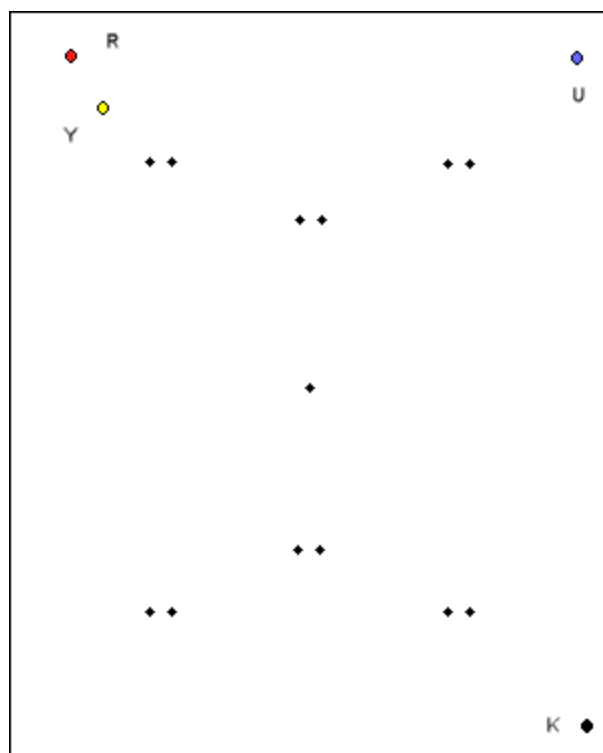
### 3.I.7 Your weakness exploited

What will UK do in Fig. 3.24? If you have a deserved reputation for being a weak player of precision croquet, he may play U to spot (1). If you have a deserved reputation for being a weak approacher of hoops from corners, he may play U just outside II. Each position is menacing if you have the relevant weakness, however strong the rest of your game may be.

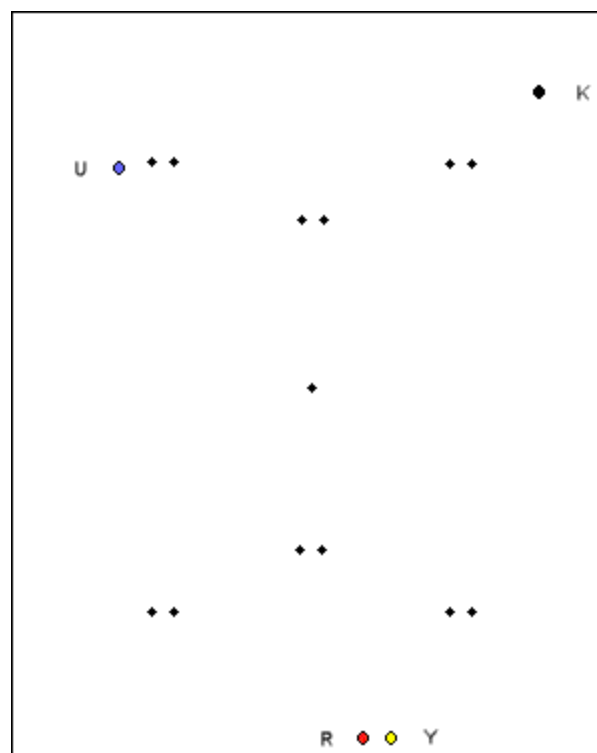
You can often compensate for your weakness by using canny croquet: Fig. 3.25 after [U to II] and Fig. 3.26 after [U to spot (1)]. However, if I am playing UK to your RY the availability of such resources will rarely dissuade me from playing one or other of those menacing finesses. Human frailty makes us blind to our weaknesses, and you as RY will too often try for the break instead of using canny croquet.



*Fig. 3.24 (all balls for 1; UK to play)*



*Fig. 3.25 (R for 2; Y for 1; UK to play)*



*Fig. 3.26 (R for 2; Y for 1; UK to play)*

### 3.I.8 Getting the mixture right

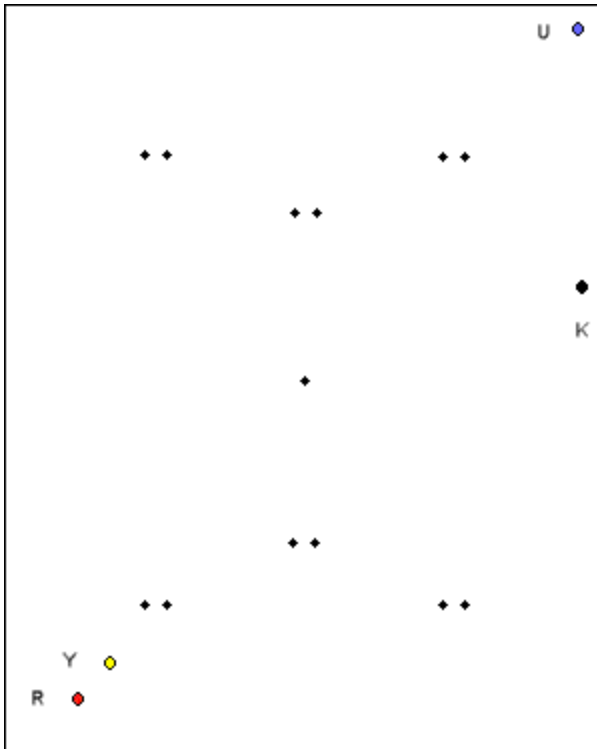


Fig. 3.27 (R for 1)

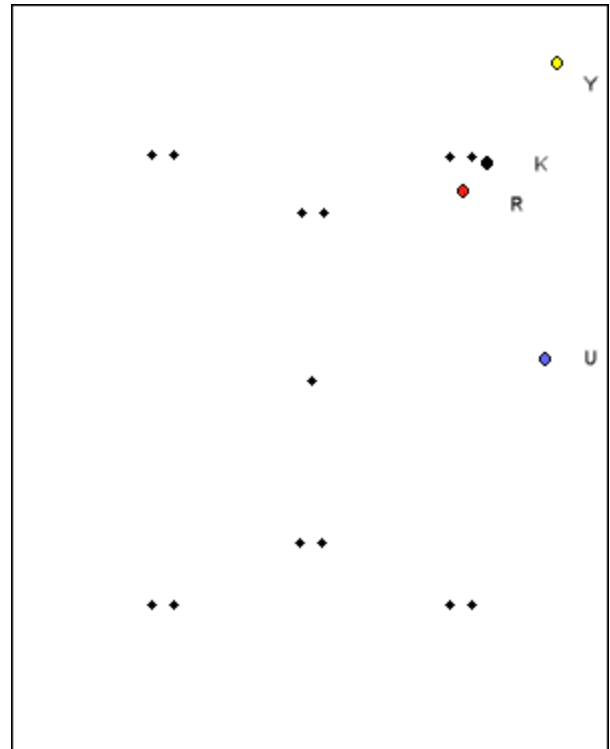


Fig. 3.28 (after hoop 3; sequel to Fig. 3.27)

When you are picking up a break from “nothing” there usually comes a point where you have to decide whether to play aggressively. As I pointed out earlier, you do not want to rely on long accurate rushes for ever: you want to get a 4-ball break. Sometimes the break develops naturally without the need for aggressive play. For example, if you use precision croquet from Fig. 3.27, you reach Fig. 3.28 after making 3. Because U and K were conveniently ahead of your break you can now pick up all four balls.

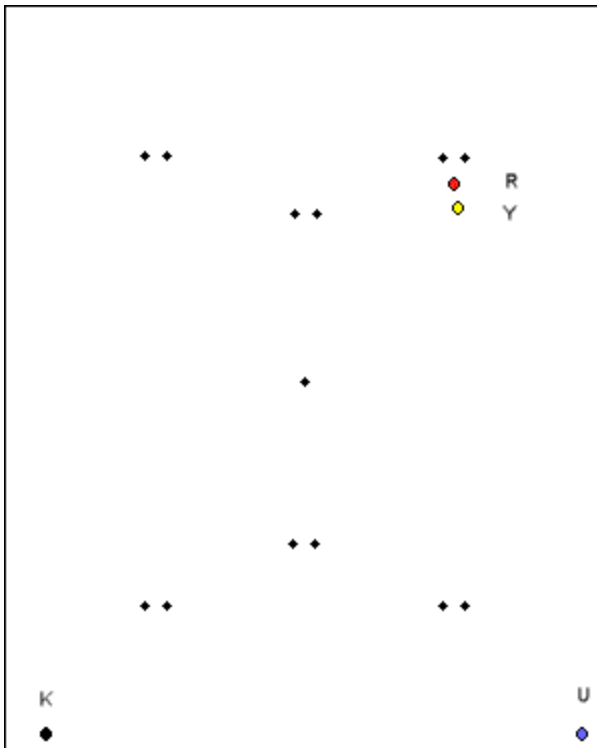


Fig. 3.29 (R has just run 3)

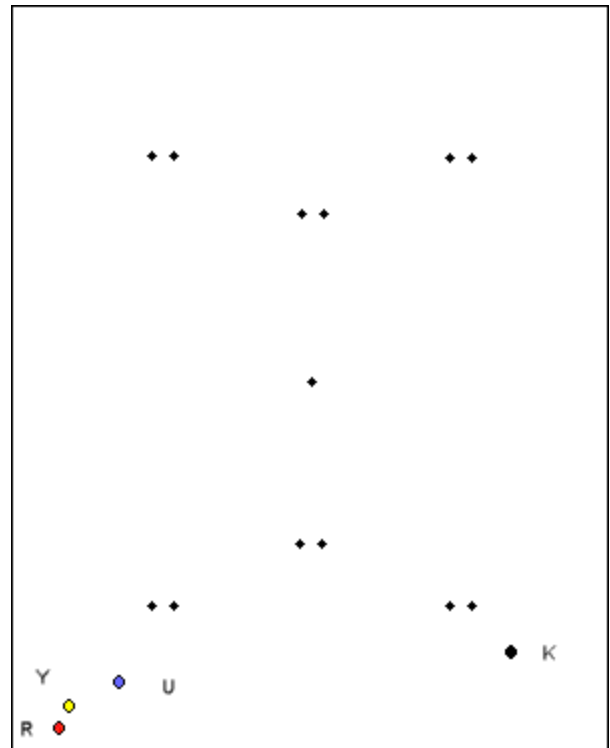


Fig. 3.30 (R about to rush Y to 6)

Fig. 3.29 is rather different. I reached this position in the final of the Championship in 1970 and tried to winkle the balls out of the corners with precision croquet while I made 4 and 5. I hoped to achieve something like Fig. 3.30, with a dolly rush to 6, by a series of accurate rushes (seven, I’ve counted them!), none of which was very difficult. I shall not bore you with the details, but I had a Spot of Bad Luck and found myself rolling up to 5 from near 4 and then rolling up to 6 from near the peg.

A similarly intermediate choice arose on page 95, and I promised to return to it. In Fig. 3.33, K has just missed the long lift shot. If you now rush R to spot (1) and if you then do a good croquet stroke you get a 3-ball break straight away. If on the other hand you rush it to spot (2) you will not be able to send it as far as 3 but you should at least be able to make 2 under enough control to get a rush on U back to R. If you were to propose to peel through 4b after making 3, you would presumably choose spot (1). If you share my view that it is better to go for the delayed triple (see page 17) you will probably be just as happy to rush R rather nearer to U. Once again, there is no correct answer, though speaking for myself when I have to make a hoop by rushing a ball from 17 yards, as in Fig. 3.33, I like to put all my available resources into getting as good a rush as possible.

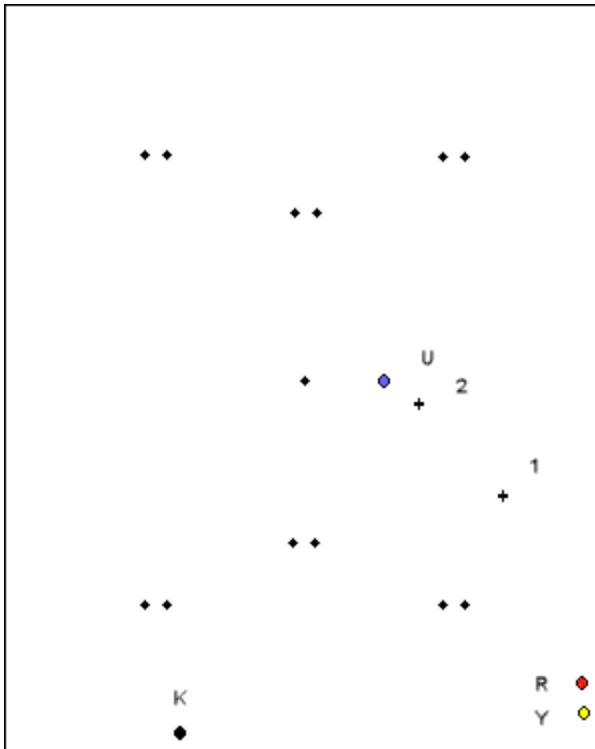


Fig. 3.33 (same as Fig. 3.7: Y for 2; R for 4b)

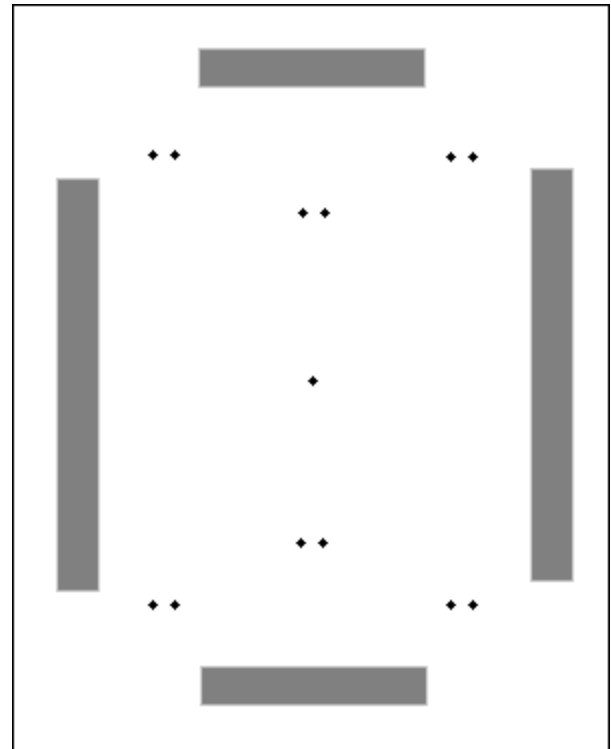


Fig. 3.34 (strategic areas)

So far in this section I have discussed the balance between precision croquet and aggressive croquet. Once you have started to set up a break canny croquet ceases to play a prominent part. All the same, during the early stages when it is not yet certain that you will get a break it is sometimes worthwhile placing the balls in positions which give you a sound leave if you have to stop. For this purpose you should have particular regard to placing balls in the strategic areas shown (dotted) in Fig. 3.34. A ball placed there cannot safely be shot at from most parts of the court, is generally well away from other balls and yet can be easily brought into the game if you keep going.

Understanding this idea comes with experience, so I shall give only one example and leave it at that. In Fig. 3.35, K has just shot and missed. Now you could send K all the way to 4, hoping to make the first three hoops one way or another and thus to obtain a break; but if you failed to make the first hoop, [U at K] would be a good shot for UK. If instead you send K to spot (1) and rush Y to U, you can afford not to get position for the first hoop and to join up near II.

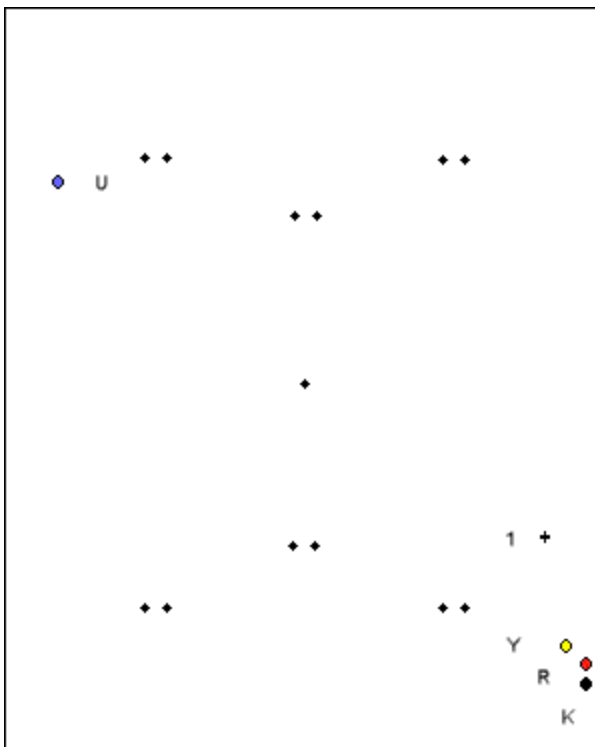


Fig. 3.35 (all balls for 1; RY to play)

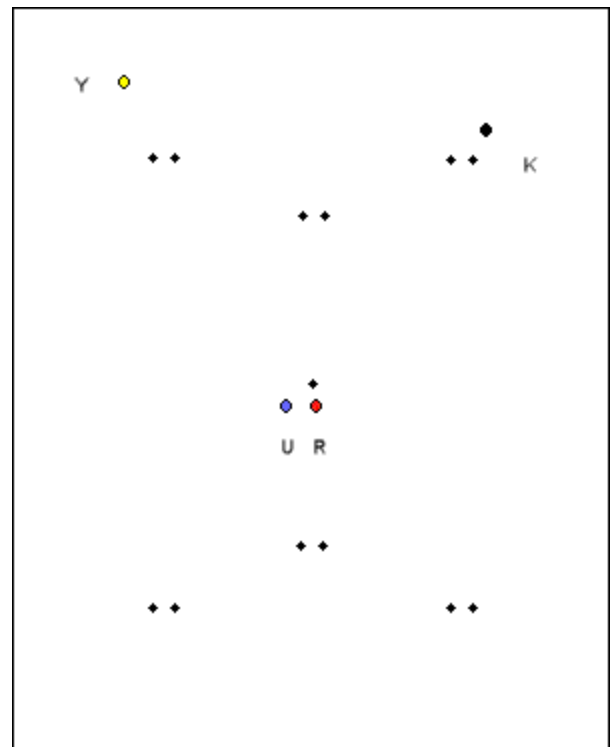


Fig. 3.36 (R for 2, having had Y and K)

Another useful safeguard when you are struggling to establish a break is the mid-court cross-wire. Opportunities for this usually arise by chance, so you need to be on the look-out for them. In Fig. 3.36 you are for 2. You have had Y and K and have failed to get your rush on U to 2. Now you should rush U to a spot wired from K and take off to 2.

### 3.1.9 That Quiz

In tackling this question, remember that you have reached the final of the Championship and that UK has been respectful enough to put both his balls in corners not once but twice. You may be playing well, but my answer is that you should not make 4. Leave the Fig. 3.37 position with R and Y about 2 yards apart. Now any substantial movement by U or K away from the baulk corners will allow you to have a decent attempt to pick up a break.

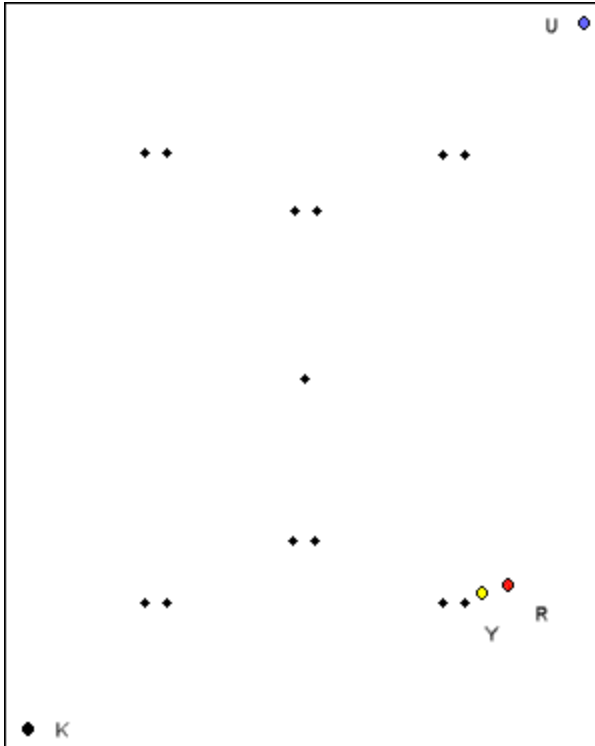


Fig. 3.37 (R for 4; Y for 4b; UK to play)

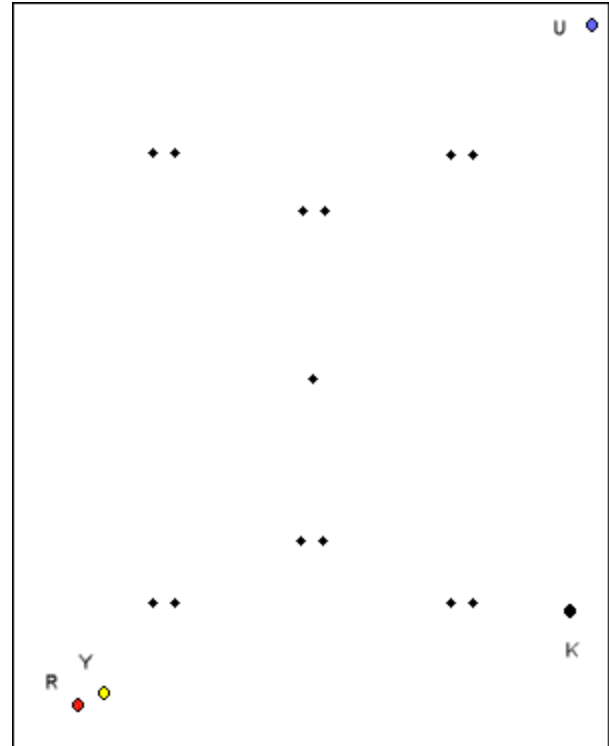


Fig. 3.38

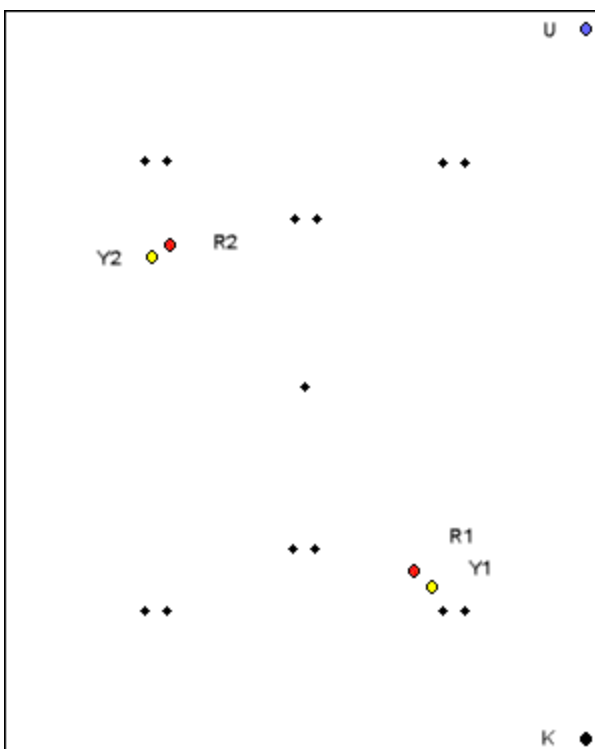


Fig. 3.39 (R and Y wired from K)

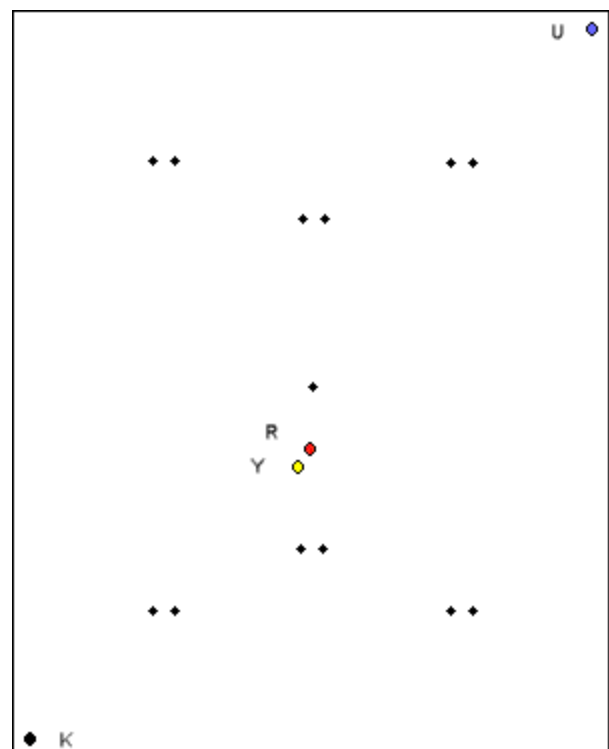


Fig. 3.40 (R and Y wired from K)



The most interesting of these movements is [K to IV], which denies you the chance to establish a break by precision croquet but rather plays into your hands by letting you try to approach 4 from IV for the second time in five minutes. The continuation for you if you decline that opportunity is intricate. You should make for Fig. 3.39 ( $R_1, Y_1$ ). Then if UK plays K just outside IV you go to Fig. 3.39 ( $R_2, Y_2$ ); and if [K to I], Fig. 3.40. Each leave wins the tactical battle for you outright unless UK has the coolness to keep U near III and K near I. If he does, you play with Y, rushing R to U and U to K. Then, once you have loosened UK's grip on the baulk corners, your threat to play with Y instead of R should prove irresistible.

Consequently, UK should play U just outside III in Fig. 3.37. You then rush Y to K and make the Fig. 3.38 because it is not so easy for you to rush Y to the wiring line in Fig. 3.39. If you try to do that and fail, you can easily leave yourself a rush to 4 from near IV with K somewhere between 1 and 2: then UK has nothing better than [K to I] and you are back where you started, free to have another try.

If you think I work things out fully like that during a match you vastly overestimate my powers of concentration. I do not, and I am not suggesting that you should try. In practice the way you should work it out is by recognising that it is wrong to make 4 immediately, and by seeing that Fig. 3.37 leaves UK no useful move. You continue the reasoning turn by turn, relying on such experience as you have acquired. I have analysed the quiz about eight turns ahead. In practice you will rarely need to look more than three or four ahead. Another practical point is that I have assumed that UK makes the best move each time, whereas during a real match your opponent has plenty of scope for error. It is rare to meet anyone who has a good reply to every problem you set him. Perhaps I myself have fallen into error in the analysis I have just given. (In Fig. 3.38, should the rush be laid towards U?)

### 3.I.10 It's all so obvious

I expect you knew most of what I have said so far in this Article. Well, so did I after only a few years in the game, but it was disorderly knowledge. I failed to appreciate the value of a balanced style and made no effort to remove weaknesses from my game. I am pretty sure that my own lack of insight was typical of most croquet players. We get set in our ways, preferring the strokes we do best and letting our less good strokes atrophy. One of my *bêtes noires* is the player who always takes off from the same side and who "cannot" take off from the other. You and I may fancy that we are above that sort of nonsense, but unless we are very careful we acquire other strokes which we "cannot" do.

### 3.I.11 Practice

Up to a point everyone practises a little - the occasional friendly game or the odd half-hour during a tournament. Not counting that, I once went without practice for over ten years and I do not suppose I was unique in that respect. I simply cannot bring myself to tell you to practise; but you are unlikely to become really good without practice and once you are really good you are unlikely to remain so without regular play. The outcome of a match may turn on your ability to approach 3 from the third corner. If you started that match without being proficient at that stroke then, frankly, you were unprepared. If you want to become an expert player you simply must master such strokes, and if that means you have to practise then you have to practise.

There is little that is more interesting in croquet than the art of practising *during play*. I mentioned on page 98 that you can use canny croquet to get a short knock-up, and everyone knows to use the first turns of the game to gauge the speed of the lawn; but you can be much more ambitious. In Fig. 3.41 you are for 2, croqueting K at  $K_1$ , in your first break of the day. Your next stroke gives little scope for experiment, but you should pay careful attention to the amount of pull and to the softness of the turf. You should master such variable factors as early in the game as possible. Now let us suppose you have croqueted the balls to  $R_2$  and  $K_2$ . You do not need a rush after 2: any old roquet to the East will do. You therefore might as well use this opportunity to practise some precision croquet. Do not just roquet U; do not just rush it; choose a spot in front of 2 and try to rush U to *that exact spot*. Apply the same, quite unnecessary, standards of accuracy to the hoop approach. Try to get a perfect rush to IV. (Had K been in a better position at 3, you might have forgone the rush after 2 and practised the split shot.)

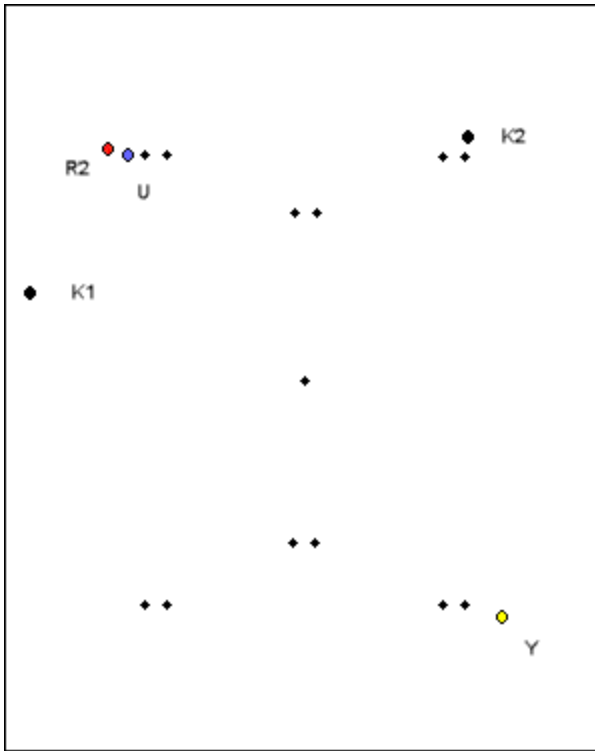
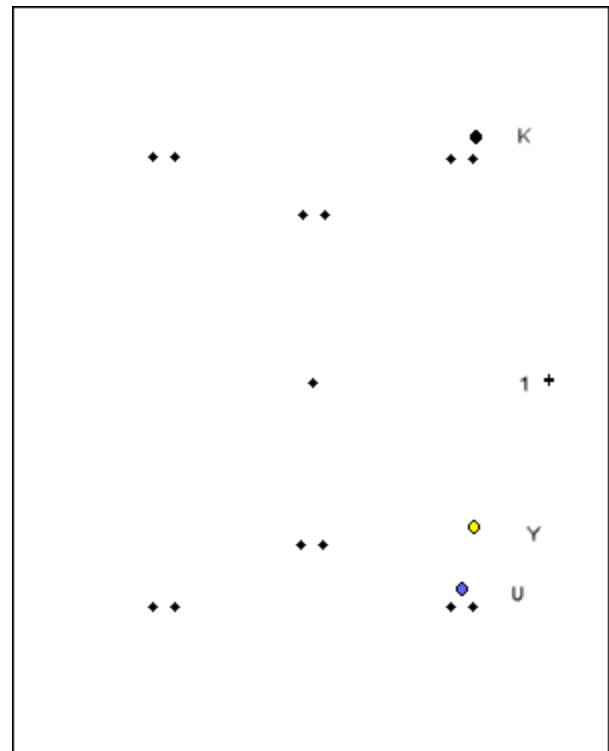
Fig. 3.41 (R for 2, croquetting K at K<sub>1</sub>)

Fig. 3.42 (R for 3, croquetting K)

Now we go to hoop 3 (Fig. 3.42). Again, you practise precision croquet by trying to give yourself a (quite unnecessary) perfect forward rush after the hoop. Suppose you get it. *Do not take it.* To have got it is sufficient reward at this stage. Now you are going to practise approaching a hoop from the corner. Rush U to spot (1) and send it to 5 (or wherever else you want it), pretending that Y is a hoop which you have to run. And so it goes on.

You will have got the idea by now. Not only can you practise a wide range of strokes, but you can also practise the same stroke repeatedly if you so wish. You will generally not get many such chances to practise unless you give yourself good pioneers, as you cannot risk breaking down. For the same reason the one thing you cannot afford to practise during play is the hoop stroke. Now look back at that break from 2 to 4 and see how dully you might have played it. You might have made 2 casually, roqueted U to B baulk, shoved it up to 4, made 3 off K and taken off to Y: all very sound, but you would have learnt almost nothing.

Equally sterile would have been a break devoted to precision croquet. You need to mix in a few difficult split shots at a stage of the game when you can afford a little inaccuracy. Leave the fancy stuff until later, when you do your triple. (I once used to play all my breaks as precisely as possible. It did not pay in the long run.)

### 3.I.12 Heterodoxy

The capacity to surprise can reap rewards, as did the reverse rush when it was first introduced. The most usual opportunities are the opening and leaves, where you can sometimes bamboozle your opponent with something a little unusual even though your play may not stand up to careful analysis. The successful taking of an outrageous risk can sometimes make an otherwise indomitable opponent quiver with rage and indignation.

It cannot be sound policy to be unorthodox on a regular basis (reverse rush again), but you will benefit from playing with a lively mind. Keep out of a rut. Do not just surprise your opponent: surprise yourself once in a while. Occasionally players who have been pegged out snatch victory by approaching the first hoop from IV. Such people do not necessarily *practise* that shot.

### 3.I.13 Tight hoops

Precision croquet was developed in the days when 3¾-inch hoops were regularly used in major tournaments, and were not always very firm in the ground. There came a time when those conditions were thought to contribute, detrimentally in the view of some, to the frequent defeats of leading players by those considered less able. The school that holds that narrow hoops, firmly fixed in fast lawns, “sorts out the men from the boys” eventually gained general acceptance and has not been displaced. A consequence is that precision croquet is now genuinely more difficult to play. You have to treat a tight hoop with respect, especially if the ground is not perfectly flat.

I am an unashamed fan of precision croquet - Shakespeare to aggressive croquet's slapstick. The dramatic climax of aggressive croquet is somewhat obvious, the peripeteia contrived, and when the crisis has passed it is too often followed by

the bathos of a simple-minded break. There is nothing to rival the gradual build-up of a precision break, particularly when you can look forward to a little thought being given to the leave.

### 3.I.14 Envoi

Nowadays fashion has swung away from precision croquet and towards aggressive croquet. Precision croquet may embody all that is most graceful and accomplished in croquet, and canny croquet the complementary virtues of wisdom and patience; but what people enjoy best is aggressive croquet. Everyone likes a trier, a player with spirit. Careful analysis might show that aggressive croquet does not always pay, but in our hearts we know better.

## Part II: Technique

Part VI of Article I dealt with special tricks that are useful when you are peeling. This Part now deals with tricks and tips which are mainly of use during the early stages of a break. Some of what I said in Article I would be appropriate here also.

### 3.II.1 Taking off to two balls

In Fig. 3.43 you have just hit in and are taking off to U and K. You want to roquet one towards the other so as to make it easier to get a good rush to your hoop, so aim your take-off either to the left of U or to the right of K. Every now and then I am surprised to see experienced players making the error of taking off towards a spot midway between two such balls.

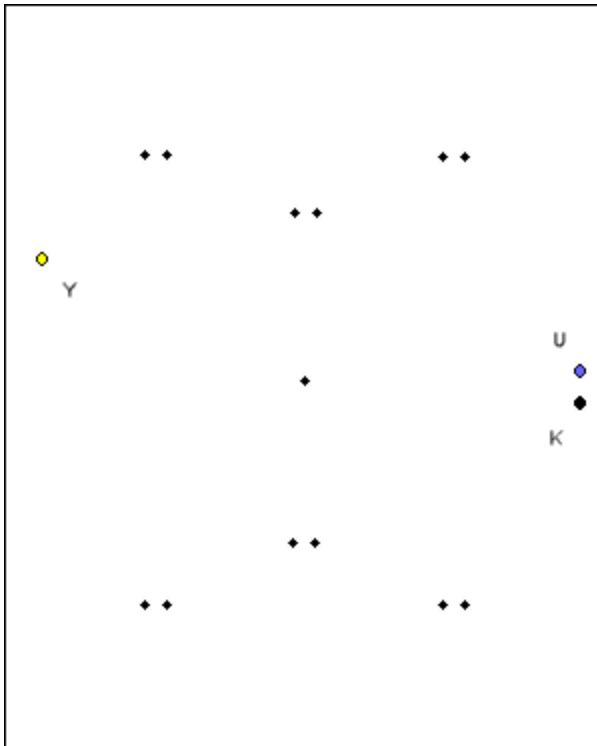


Fig. 3.43 (R for 1 croquetting Y)

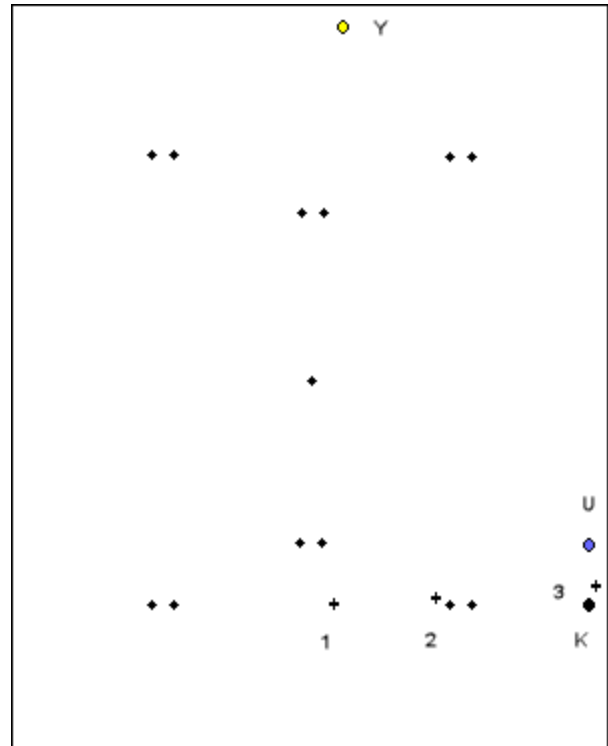


Fig. 3.44 (R for peg, croquetting Y; Y for 3b)

### 3.II.2 Wiring

Wiring is easy only if you make it easy. You help to do that by giving yourself a large margin for error. In Fig. 3.44 you propose to take off to U and to crosswire U and K across the 3b hoop. The way not to do it is to try to send U to spot (1). You will only have a few inches to play with when placing K; and besides, both U and K will be well away from 3b. The correct method is to try to send U to spot (2), putting R near to spot (3). Then if you get U within a yard of the hoop there is a wiring area more than a foot wide into which to rush K.

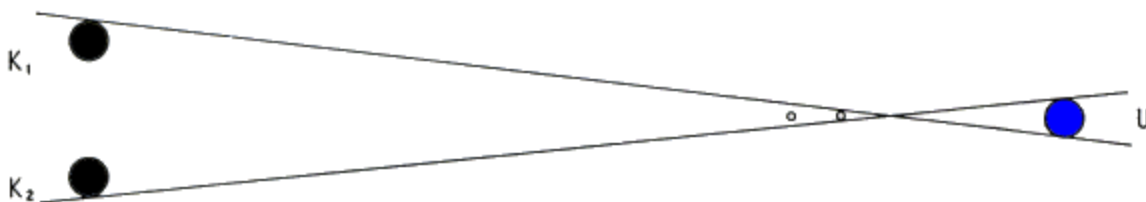


Fig. 3.45 (not to scale)

Lord Tollemache (page 96) mistakenly believed that “a half-lawn shot at the peg is the same as a full-lawn shot at a ball”. A lifetime’s experience of croquet is no substitute for a smattering of geometry. I shall briefly demonstrate how placing a ball

near to a hoop creates a surprisingly large wiring area, even when the hoop is side-on. In Fig. 3.45, U cannot hit either  $K_1$  or  $K_2$ . If U and K are respectively 2 yards and 18 yards from the hoop, the margin for error when placing K, i.e. the distance between the centres of  $K_1$  and  $K_2$ , is approximately  $(18/2 - 1)$  ball diameters, which is 29 inches. If you doubt me, try it out on a lawn.

I presented an example of wiring in terms of “how to do it” and “how not to do it”. In practice you seldom get that kind of choice: usually the choice is whether or not it is worth trying to crosswire. The example in Fig. 3.36 was an almost unmissable wiring whose existence some players would not notice. The example in Fig. 3.44 came perilously close to being a position in which you should not try to crosswire at all. A wiring attempt may deprive you of the opportunity to take off back to your partner ball, so that you leave yourself no good rush. If the wiring area is large, you can usually afford to do that take-off. Expertise in wiring largely consists of recognising a potentially large wiring area.

### 3.II.3 Prising balls off the yard-line

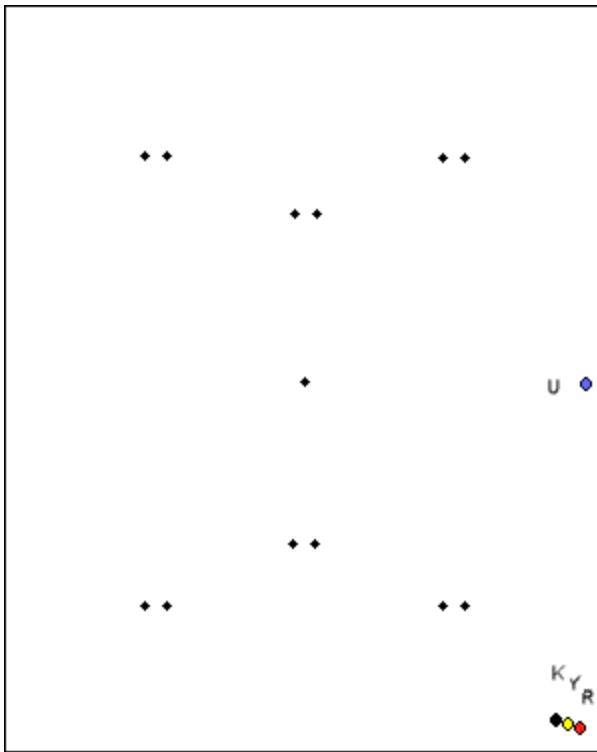


Fig. 3.46 (R for 1: promotion cannon)

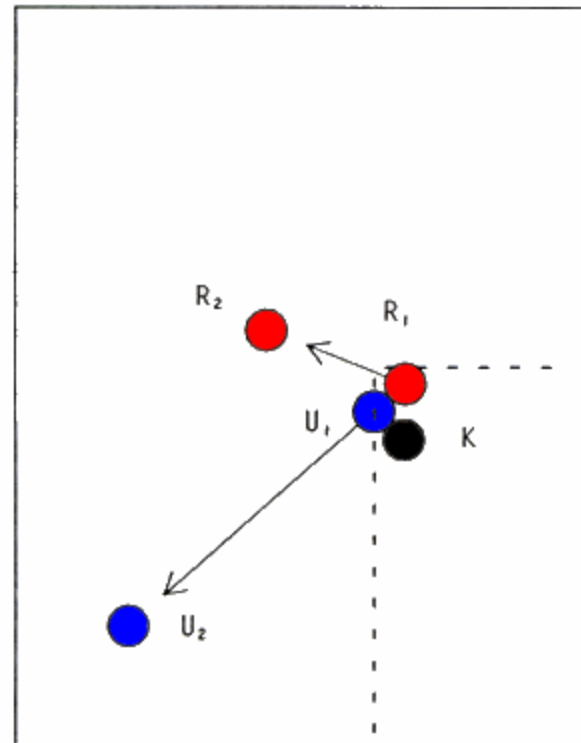
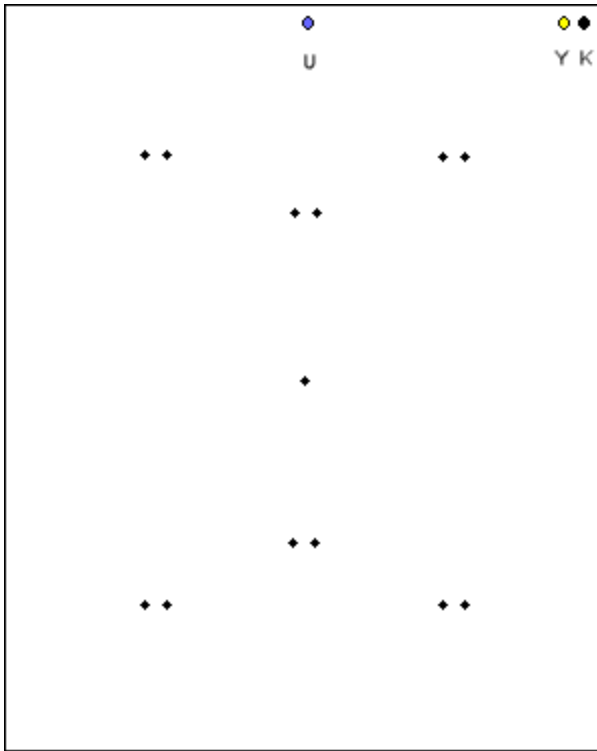


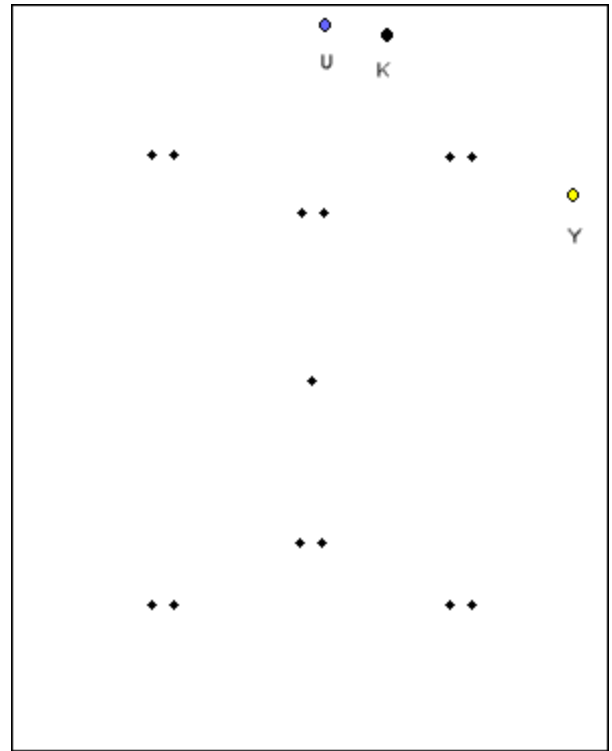
Fig. 3.47 (R croqueting U: avoiding the “worm”)

The best way to get a corner ball into play is the “three-ball” or “corner” cannon, a subject well covered in the existing literature. I have three things to add on this subject. (a) The three-ball promotion cannon, whether from the corner or from the yard-line generally, deserves wider attention. In Fig. 3.46 you do a split shot going to U. (b) If you are unable to do a proper corner cannon because you need a good rush in an awkward direction, you should never do what is sometimes called the “worm” cannon (see Solomon, page 106). Instead, play the stroke shown in Fig. 3.47, which does not even shake the third ball K (which is not a fault). In that way you get U well away from the corner and get a guaranteed perfect rush. I have finally given up being angry at the frequency with which the “worm” cannon is still peddled to innocent readers. I can only weep with impotent frustration. I should mention that I have seen a demonstration of a “super-worm” cannon, where you place the balls almost in a straight line and play a substantial roll stroke. It seems to have potential. The idea is to get your ball and the promoted ball to the same destination, so that no rush is needed when they get there. At the same time the croqueted ball is brought into play. (c) Some situations call for the “wafer” cannon, where there is only a tiny gap between your ball and the third ball.

If you rush a ball (Y, say) to one foot from a corner ball (K, say) and take off to get a rush on K, your break is hardly improved at all by the rush on Y. You would have been better off if Y had missed the corner by one or two yards. If the lawn is easy near the corner, it is sometimes worth your while to rush Y deliberately wide of the corner. (Almost invariably, when you rush Y towards K’s corner your rush is a case of “hit and hope”. Why be coy about it? We do, of course, put on a show of having intended our best strokes, but surely we do not have to keep up the pretence in the privacy of these pages.)



*Fig. 3.48 (various situations:  
R for 2, croqueting Y  
R for 1, croqueting Y*



*Fig. 3.49 (R for 2, croqueting K)*

#### Quiz

*R croqueting K, when for (a) 4b; (b) 3; (c) 2; where Y and K are (1) 1 yard apart; (2) 9 inches apart)*

There are two special tricks with which you can mitigate the bad luck of just missing the corner cannon. The simple one is to roll R and Y into the corner area, so that when you roquet K both Y and K are sent more or less along the two yard-lines. This stroke can be an invaluable weapon, but it is a bludgeon and not a rapier. If in Fig. 3.48 you are for 2, the trick can get you to Fig. 3.49, but it is often difficult to judge how far you will send K.

The other more involved trick, is of very recent discovery (see the article in the Australian Croquet Gazette, No. 1 of 1984 at page 10). In Fig. 3.48 you are now for 1 and have, as before, rushed Y one foot wide of K. You want to rush K accurately to U, but you cannot get behind K and the previous trick is too inaccurate. The answer is to line up Y just to the right of the centre of K and to do a little stop shot. K goes off (which does not end the turn), Y goes a yard to the right and R *passes through the now vacant corner spot* so that when K is respotted you have a dolly rush to U. This trick is useful not only for the rush which you get, but also for getting Y further out of the corner than you might otherwise have done.

By a happy coincidence, all the other techniques which I propose to discuss appear as solutions to the following little quiz (my last, I promise you), and once again you should have a go at it before reading on; but this time you have some respite, in that I do not expect you to get the right answers if you do not already know the relevant techniques. I start giving my answers over the page.

I use Fig. 3.48 once again, but with a slight difference: you are croqueting not Y but K. You have not yet had Y or U. How do you set up a break in the following six situations:-

- you are for 4b;
- you are for 3;
- you are for 2;

where (1) the gap between K and Y is one yard; (2) the gap between K and Y is 9 inches?

Clearly, most of these positions will lead to easy breaks if you are prepared to risk a 9-yard hoop approach or a 6-yard roquet. The aim is to make things a bit easier, if possible. Anyone who tries a trick and finds that it is not working can generally rescue the situation with some aggressive croquet. The answers which I am about to give ignore such things as the state of the game and the state of the lawn, factors which are of great practical importance. I am not saying that you should invariably use the four tricks which appear among the answers.

These tricks should be in the repertoire of every minus player. Their usefulness extends far beyond the particular situations in which I demonstrate them here. At present they are virtually unknown. Too many leading players play croquet that is frankly boring. That does not matter in the least while the game is played by amateurs who have only themselves to please; but we ought not to be content to offer dreary play to the wider audience which is currently being sought through

sponsorship and television. If only out of self-respect, we should try to put on a more entertaining show. (I have not revised this paragraph from the First Edition. I am pleased to say that it is beginning to show its age.)

**(a) R for 4b; (1) 1-yard gap:** I start with the most obvious case. You stop-shot K far enough out to be within easy range of R (after making 4b), and then rush Y either to 4b or to U.

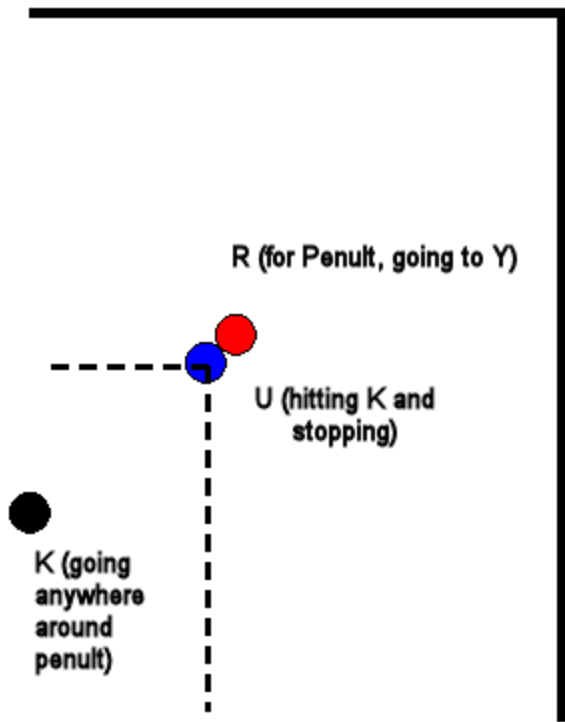


Fig. 3.50 (to scale) (a prepared promotion cannon)

carefully a foot or two just left of the line from the corner spot to penult and rush Y to U. Then rush U to 4b, make 4b and rush U to III. If that succeeds, you have the cannon shown in Fig. 3.50, by which you get a 3-ball break by cannoning K to penult while you go to Y. By the time you make 4b, Y ought to be at least a yard or so off the yard-line, so that if you fail to get the rush on U to III you should be able to contrive an easy rush to penult and thus save the situation. Two further points to note are that (i) you can afford to rush U a foot or so to the right of III and (ii) you may be able to rush U behind Y immediately after making 4b, leading to the mirror image of the intended promotion cannon.

**(b) R for 3; (1) 1-yard gap:** Now we are getting a little more exotic. Clearly it is not 3 that is the problem hoop but 4. The prepared promotion cannon which I have just discussed is not really accurate enough at a range of 28 yards. We are looking for a way of getting a pioneer at 4 while at the same time getting a decent rush to 3. I recommend a “pseudo-cannon” or “open cannon”, sending K a bit to the left of 4 and rushing Y to U. It is not a difficult stroke once you have got to know it. (Note: This is a very versatile stroke. You may recall the “stunningly simple” example which I gave on page 7.)

**(b) R for 3; (2) 9-inch gap:** With such a small gap the angles do not permit the open cannon rushing Y to U, but you can do something even better. You can in one stroke send K to 4 and rush Y to two or three yards in front of 3. Try it and see. You leave U alone. (Note: This is virtually a corner cannon. It is a very powerful tool.)

**(c) R for 2; (1) 1-yard gap:** Here you obviously aim to make 2 off U. The problem is to plan how you can later get a rush to 3 with a ball at 4 from a position where initially all the balls are on the North yard-line. A plausible idea is to do the same open cannon as in (b)(1), sending K to 4 and rushing Y to U. You then have to make both 2 and 3 from 9-yard rushes, which is not too difficult. Alternatively you can set up the break by a series of worthy but unremarkable stop shots, split shots and rushes. There is no “smart” solution to this particular position.

(a) R  
for  
4b;  
(2) 9-  
inch  
gap:  
Now,  
you

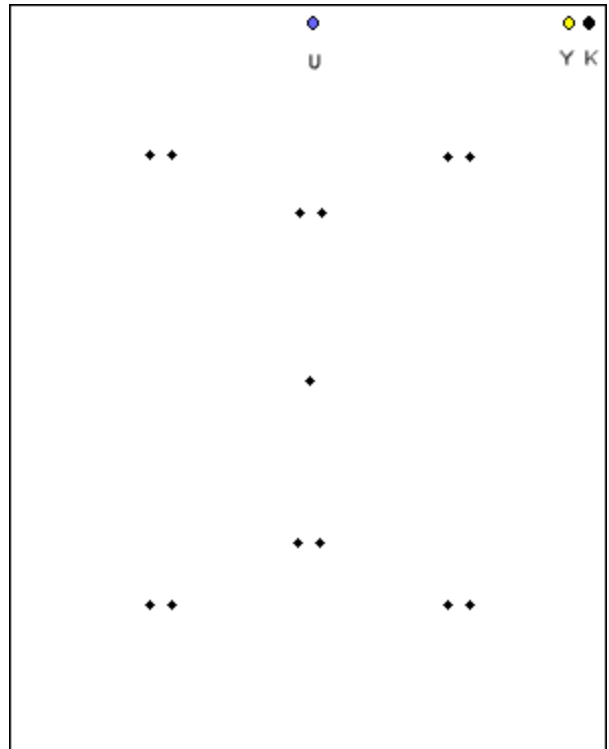


Fig. 3.48 (repeated)  
R (for penult, going to Y)  
U (hitting K and stopping)  
K (going anywhere around penult)

cannot really send K within easy range of R after 4b. One thing you could do is to leave K on the corner spot, getting a dolly rush on Y to 4b and planning to get a corner cannon after 4b. That plan is fine if it works. If it does not, you find yourself conceding a lift with all the balls in baulk and no safe way of proceeding. A better plan is to prepare a promotion cannon. Send K very

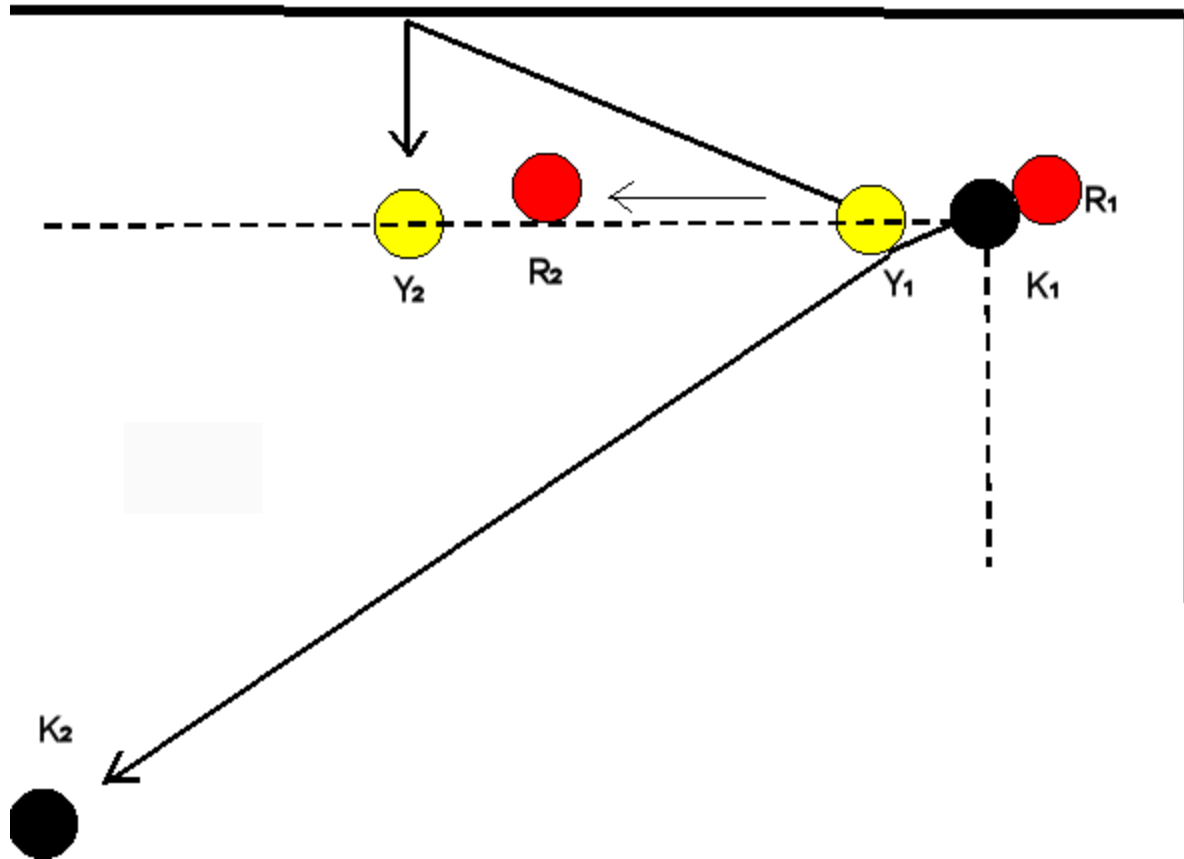


Fig. 3.51 (not to scale) (R for 2, croquetting K: before and after the cannon)

**(c) R for 2: (2) 9-inch gap:** Here, things are very different. You cannot send K to 4 with an open cannon, nor can you get it a useful way out of the corner with a stop shot. This is an occasion for a rare variation of a cannon which I described earlier. You line up K so that it will strike Y a glancing blow about one quarter full, and do a fairly firm little shot. K cannons off Y and goes well into the court, Y is sent off the court about 2 or 3 yards further along the boundary and R passes through the spot where Y had been and with any luck will come to rest just short of the spot where Y is put back on: see Fig. 3.51. This magical trick produces an easy break from nowhere, because you can get K a surprisingly long way into the court, but it has a catch: you really do need to practise it first, because you have to get the angle at which K strikes Y just right. I could not recommend this trick in the previous position because at one yard away Y was beyond the safe range for it.

As a rider to that quiz, what would you do in the last example if the gap was only a quarter of an inch? You could do a modest shot sending K two or three yards up the yard-line and cannoning Y a yard or so, and follow that up with a rush to U. More interesting would be a substantial split shot sending K twenty yards or so out of the corner and cannoning Y all the way to U. You would send R there too, of course; and by playing only a slightly rolled split shot you could be sure that Y stayed ahead of R and did not cause any unpleasantness. Once again, this is a trick that calls for practice.

### 3.II.4 Targets and “spread”



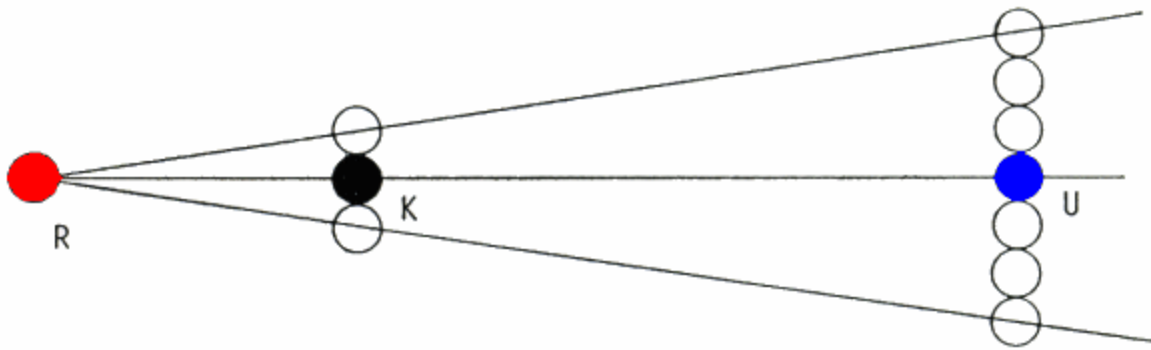


Fig. 3.52

I shall start this section with a slight digression on the subject of targets. Fig. 3.52 shows R shooting at K. U is three times as far away from R as K is. The outer lines show the path taken by the centre of R if it just hits K (or just misses it). The angle between the outer lines indicates how much scope R has for error. The distance between the outer lines at K is 2 ball diameters and at U is 6 ball diameters, three times as much because U is three times as far away. If you hit R in slightly the wrong direction the sideways error is three times as great at U as it is at K. That sideways error increases steadily with distance and is said in mathematical parlance to be “proportional to distance”.

However, some errors increase more markedly with distance. The error caused by a sidewind or a steady sideways slope is proportional to the square of the time taken by the ball, which in the case of a hard-hit shot we may take to be proportional to the square of the distance. Such an error will be not three times but nine times as great at U as it is at K. (To add further obfuscation, the effect of random disturbances such as worm-casts is roughly proportional to distance raised to the impenetrable power of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ .)

We do not need to go into the mathematics, as common experience of the phenomenon can be adequately expressed in words. There is more to hitting a long shot than just propelling your ball in the right direction. When you are shooting at a distant double target on a sloping lawn, the slope can take your ball off course so badly that the size of the target becomes in retrospect almost immaterial: you would have missed it anyway.

You are sometimes faced with a choice, when you have a lift, between a 14-yard shot at a single ball and a 28-yard shot at a perfect double. Geometrically they present the same target: if you were to draw a diagram of the position you would find that the angles between the pairs of outer lines were the same. However, the possible effects of wind and slope make the 14-yard target clearly the better one. Do not shoot for the double target just because you are too proud to be seen missing from 14 yards. Equally, do not shoot for the double from a spot well wide of III in the mistaken belief that you are more likely to hit if there is a good gap to aim for.

In Fig. 3.53 (deliberately not to scale for the sake of clarity), the dotted lines show the margin for error, from the point of view of the right-hand edge of R, when you shoot with R at K. You maximise your chance of hitting any target by aiming for its middle, and in this case that means shooting so that the right-hand edge of R goes midway between the dotted lines, i.e. along line “A”. Consequently your aim will be along line “B”, which you will see appears to “miss” K entirely. Some players are misled, consciously or subconsciously, into aiming too far right in this sort of situation, drawn towards K as if by a magnet.

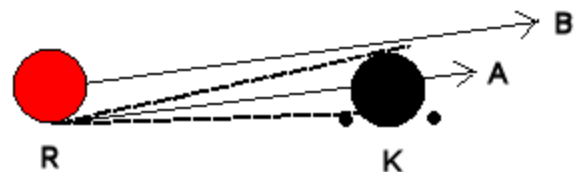


Fig. 3.53 (not to scale) (R shoots at K)

Sometimes you can afford to miss a shot on one side but not on the other. I often shoot at the right-hand half of my opponent's tice, so as to minimise the risk of missing on the left and leaving him a double target. Equally in Fig. 3.53 you might aim left of line “B”, hoping to avoid hitting the hoop.

That digression serves to introduce the broader concept of a “target” in the context of the building of a break. Fig. 3.54 is a reworking of Fig. 1.48, showing the target which you are aiming at with your rush after 1b. Now you can see that spot (3), which I advised you to aim for, is roughly in the middle of the target. I have also previously mentioned the idea of aiming slightly to one side of the centre of a target for the sake of safety.



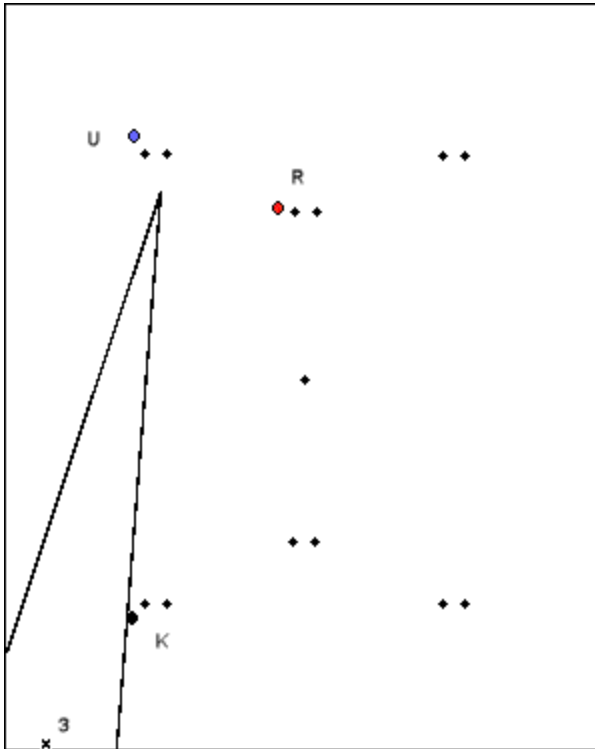


Fig. 3.54 (compare Fig. 1.48) (Y for 1b, croqueting U)

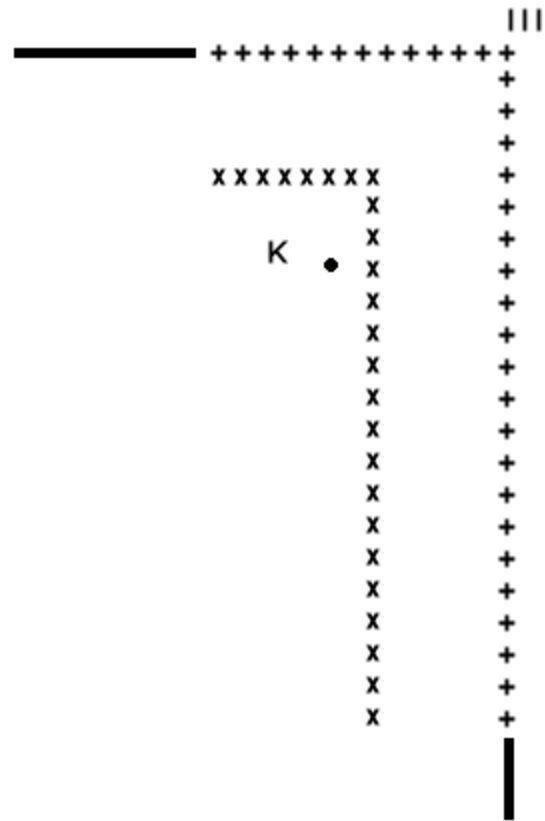
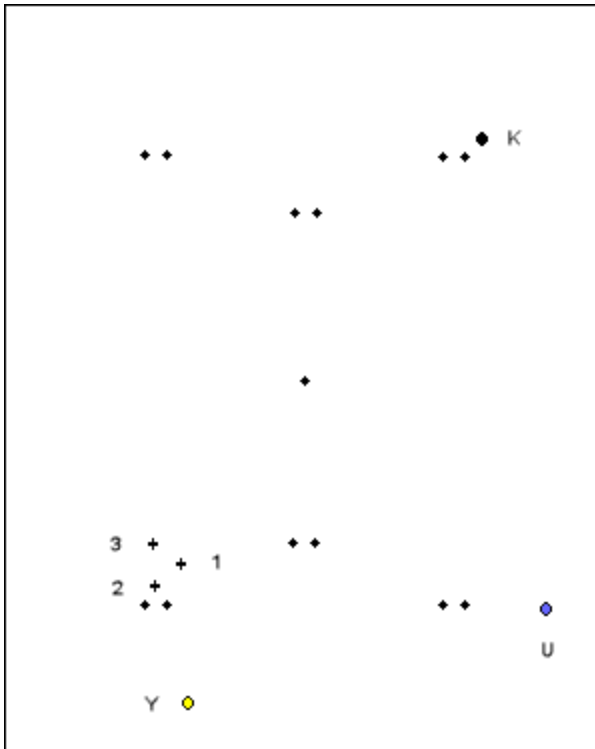


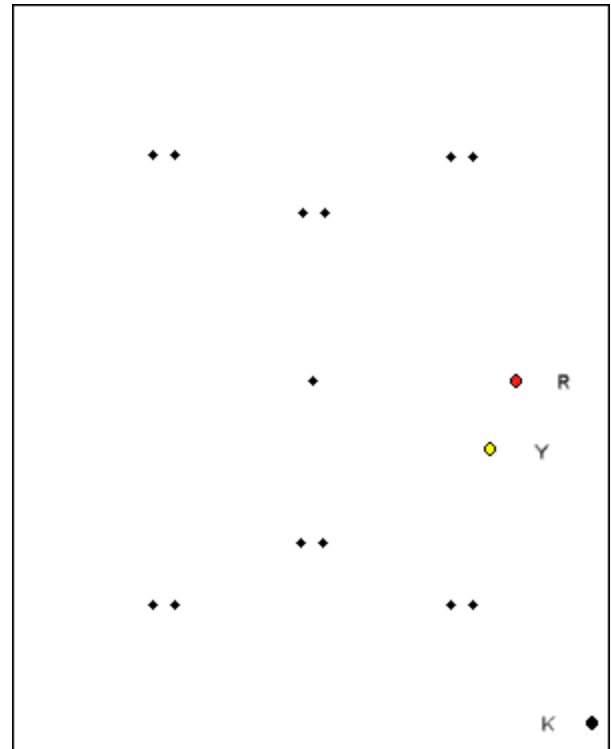
Fig. 3.55 (target area for the rush after 2)

Fig. 3.55 shows K two feet or so from III. Out of the picture, you are making 2 off Y and are going to rush Y to III. U is just outside IV. “x x x” shows the best target area for Y after it has been replaced on court, and “+ + +” shows the corresponding part of the boundary which is the target for your rush, i.e. from about 2 yards left of K to 4 yards right of K. The centre is about one yard right of K. As you can more easily afford to err to the right than to the left, you should aim your rush more like two yards right of K unless you have a dolly rush. (I am assuming here that you want to make 3 by precision croquet methods and not by approaching 3 from III.)

If in Fig. 3.56 you are approaching 1 off Y, you would be unwise to try to get a forward rush because you might not run the hoop under control. Instead, you should send Y to spot (1). Then you can run 1 to anywhere between spots (2) and (3) and still have a rush either to U or to K.



*Fig. 3.56 (R approaching 1 off Y)*



*Fig. 3.57 (R for 4, croqueting U)*

This is an example of a “double target” in this context. The two possible rushes gave you twice as large an area into which to play R after running the hoop. There will often be three separate targets for your rush after a hoop, namely the next hoop and each of the two other balls. You may be able to make a double target out of two of them. You need to be on the look-out for such chances, as they are easily missed.

Fig. 3.57 shows another kind of double target. You have just made 3 and roqueted U. As you send U to 5, do not aim to get a rush to 4, nor to K: aim to get a rush midway between the two. In that way you are reasonably certain to get a rush to somewhere useful.

A third kind arises where you take off to two distant balls. In Fig. 3.58, do not take off directly towards U and K, because if you go short you will have only U to shoot at. Take off slightly to one side, so that if you go short you will have a double target. That increases the area into which you can safely send the take-off.

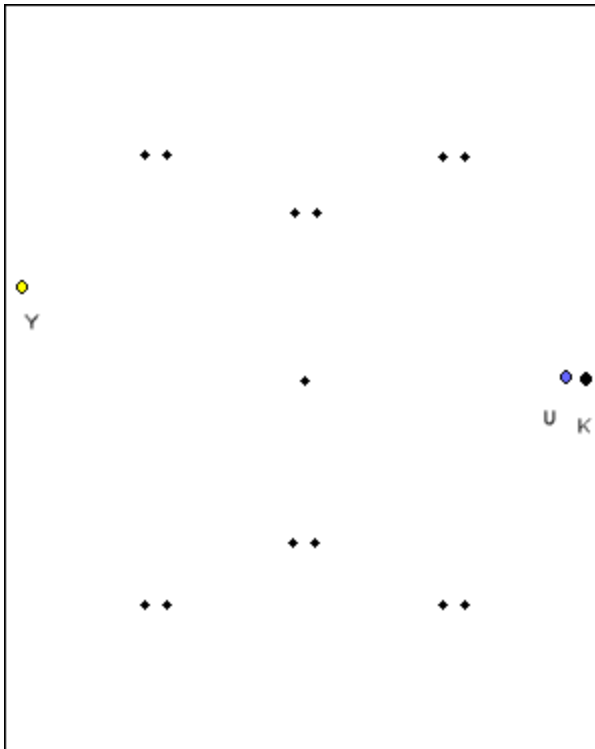


Fig. 3.58 (R croquetting Y)

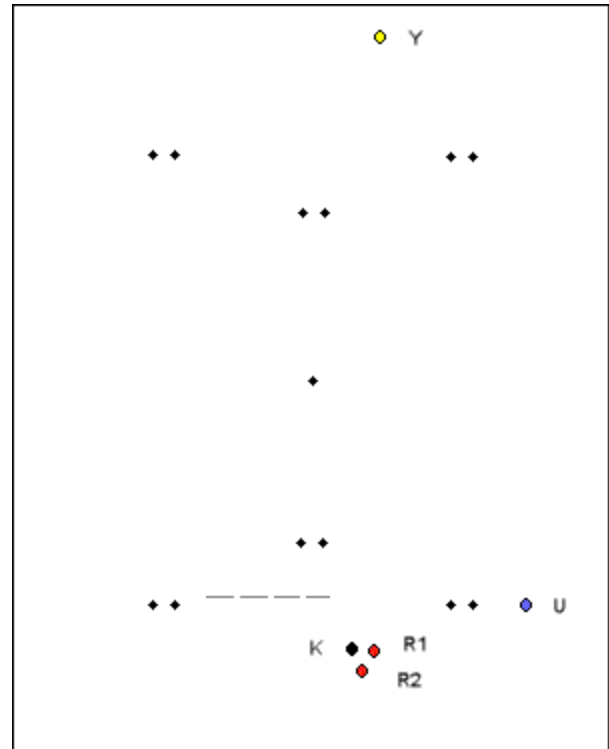


Fig. 3.59 (R has had U and Y)

At the same time as you consider your target, you must necessarily judge how erratic you are likely to be. I use the word “spread” to mean the area into which a ball is likely to be sent in a particular stroke. Try to plan the stroke so that as much of your spread lies inside your target area as possible. If the spread is much larger than the target, you should reconsider the stroke. If in Fig. 3.54, for example, you think you might well rush U wide of the lines shown, you should rush it not off the court but about level with the fifth hoop and aimed in about the direction of the more Western of the two lines.

When assessing how far I am likely to send a ball, I use as a rule of thumb a margin of error of  $\pm 10\%$ . I should hope to be more accurate than that, but it is a useful guideline. The directional margin of error of a rush or split shot cannot be forecast in quite the same way.

It is useful to remember that a misdirected cut rush will not only go in the wrong direction but will also travel a distance different from what you had planned. You can use this to your advantage. In Fig. 3.59 you have had U and Y and are trying to rush K to a position wired from U. Because of the direction of your rush from R<sub>1</sub>, you can misdirect the rush and still send K near the wiring line (dotted) if the strength of the stroke is right. If, on the other hand, your rush is “against the grain”, so that an error in direction sends the rushed ball even further from the wiring line, you have to get the rush absolutely right. The spread of the rush from R<sub>2</sub> may be so unacceptable that you would do better to abandon the wiring.

### 3.II.5 Laying rushes

There are some situations where you can prepare your rush out of a corner in anticipation of failure to pick up a break. In Fig. 3.60, you can rush Y slightly West of IV and try to take off to U moving Y to a spot which will give you a rush North of 1 from the IV corner spot. The idea is that, if you fail to approach 1 adequately, you retire to IV with a laid rush leaving no double target. The take-off itself is hard to judge accurately. You achieve the single-ball target by sending U to the right place when you approach the hoop.

### 3.II.6 I trust I make myself obscure

Now that you have understood all that, it is time you reconsidered some of your tactics as out-player against an expert opponent who knows the ropes. I am not going to give you

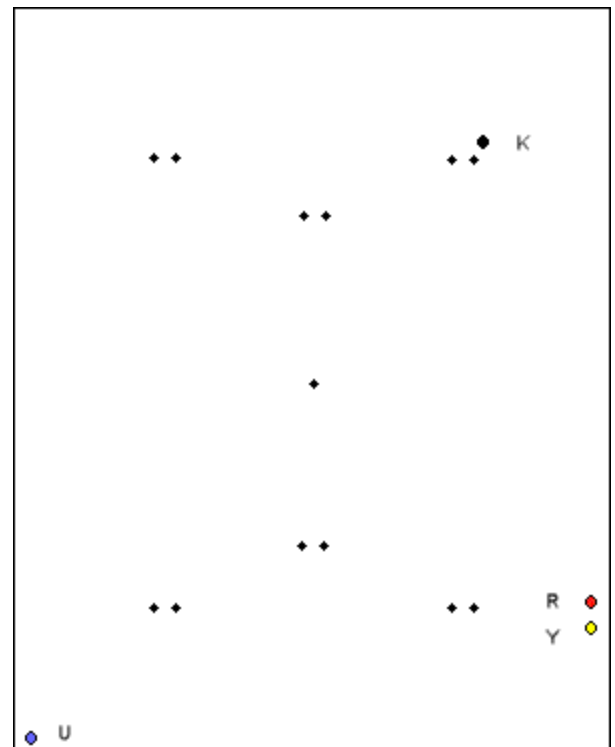


Fig. 3.60 (R for 1, Y for 4b)

everything on a plate. You are going to have to solve the next little problem all on your own:-

Your opponent goes round and leaves an NSL (Fig. 2.11). You choose to lift U (the ball at 2) and to play it just outside the third corner. Where exactly do you play it?

**Previous article:** [Article 2: The First Break](#)

**Next article:** [Article 4: The Opening](#)

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