THE CAMBRIDGE CROQUET CLUB

How to Play American Croquet

“Have a Wicket Good Time”

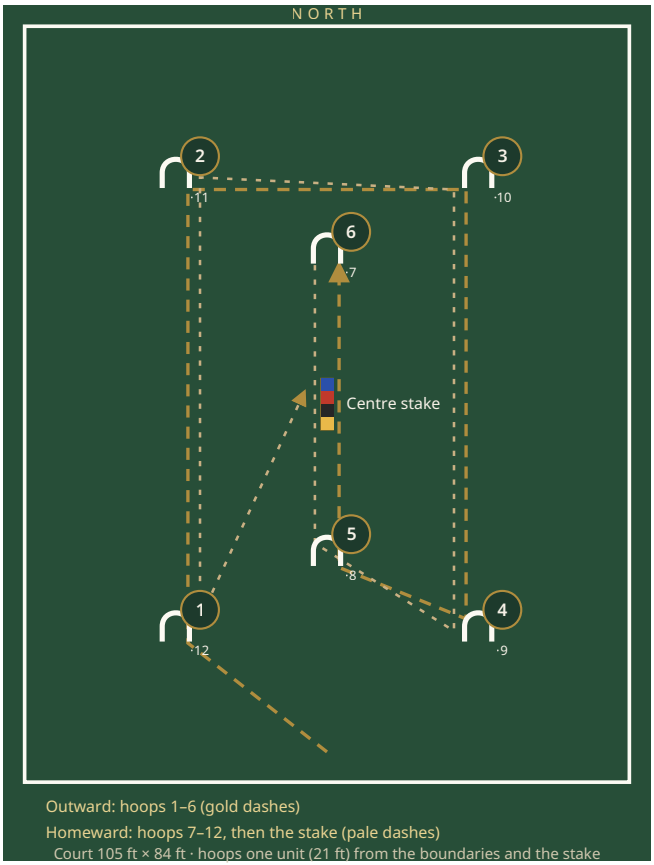
A beginner’s tutorial in the six-wicket American game — the game the Club plays at John F. Kennedy Memorial Park, Harvard Square.

The Game in Brief

American croquet is a race and a duel at once. Two sides — **Blue & Black** against **Red & Yellow** — each work their balls around a course of six hoops (wickets), out and back, and home to the centre stake. Every hoop run in the right order scores a point. A ball that runs all twelve hoops and strikes the stake is finished — “staked out” — and the first side to stake out both of its balls wins the game.

What makes the American game its own is **deadness**: once your ball has struck another ball, it may not strike that same ball again until it has run its next hoop. The whole strategy of the game grows from that one rule.

The Court



The six-wicket court. Outward through hoops 1–6, homeward through 7–12, then the stake.

A full court measures **105 feet by 84 feet** — five units long by four wide — and the proportions matter more than the size: a garden court keeps the same shape, only smaller. The six hoops stand one unit in from the boundaries and one unit either side of the centre stake. The stake carries the four colours in the order of play: **Blue, Red, Black, Yellow**, from the top down.

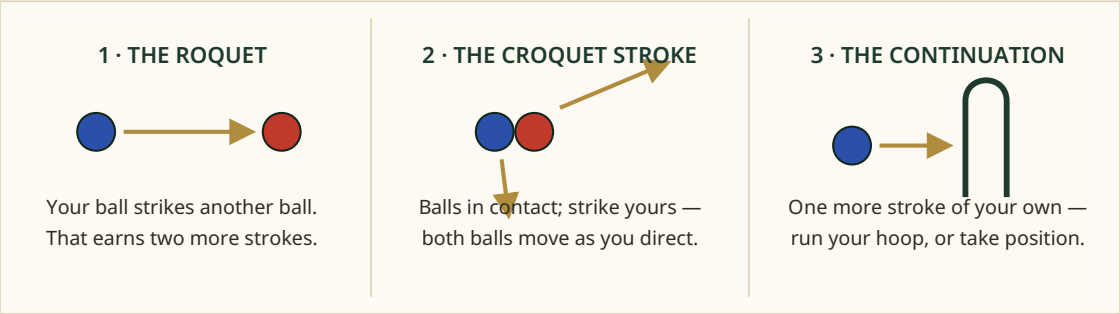
YOU WILL NEED

- A mallet for each player, four balls (blue, red, black, yellow), six hoops and the centre stake.
- Clips, if you have them, to mark each ball's next hoop — a clothes peg does nicely.
- Flat-soled shoes, and a lawn as smooth as you can find it.

How a Turn Works

The balls take their turns in a fixed order — **Blue, then Red, then Black, then Yellow** — all game long. In a doubles game each player takes one ball; in singles, each player takes two. On your ball's turn you have **one stroke** to begin with. Strokes are earned, and there are two ways to earn them:

1. **Run your hoop.** Send your ball cleanly through its next hoop, in the right direction, and you earn **one extra stroke** — the continuation stroke.
2. **Make a roquet.** Strike another ball with yours and you earn **two extra strokes**: first the *croquet stroke*, then a continuation stroke.



The three strokes of a turn: the roquet, the croquet stroke, and the continuation.

THE CROQUET STROKE

After a roquet, pick up your ball and set it down **touching the ball you struck**. Now strike your own ball so that both balls move — send the other ball where it does your side the most good (toward its own hoop, or far from yours) while your ball finishes placed for its next hoop. Then take your continuation stroke. A gentle version sends both balls a short way together; a firm "split" drives them off at an angle to one another. What you may *not* do is hold your ball still with a foot — that belongs to the backyard game, not the American rules.

Deadness — in Plain Language

> **The rule:** when your ball roquets another ball, your ball becomes **"dead"** on that ball. It cannot earn strokes from that ball again — striking it a second time before clearing a hoop is a fault and ends the turn. Running your next hoop washes the deadness away: your ball is then "alive" on every ball once more.

So the rhythm of good American play is: *roquet, croquet, continuation — and run your hoop to come alive again.* Players keep track of their deadness ball by ball; it is the first thing a new player should learn to watch, because a ball that is dead on all three others has nothing left to gain until it scores.

Boundaries, Rovers & Staking Out

- **Off the court.** A ball that rolls beyond the boundary is brought back in and set a short distance inside the line, as the rules direct; a ball sent off during a croquet stroke costs you the rest of the turn.
- **The rover.** A ball that has run all twelve hoops becomes a *rover*. It may roquet each other ball one last time, and it finishes — and leaves the game — the moment it strikes the centre stake in its own turn.
- **Winning.** The first side with both balls staked out wins. In a timed game, count instead: one point for every hoop, one for the stake — thirteen points to a ball, twenty-six to a side.

Your First Game — a Checklist

1. Set the court by the diagram and toss for colours.
2. Play the balls in from the starting end, in colour order, and run hoop 1.
3. Before every stroke, ask: *what is my next hoop, and which balls am I alive on?*
4. Use your roquets to set up your hoop, run it, and come alive again.
5. Keep your partner ball in mind — in American croquet the side wins together.

This tutorial is a beginner’s summary, written by the Cambridge Croquet Club for new players; it is not the rulebook. The full American Rules are published by the United States Croquet Association — uscroquet.org. Diagrams are the Club’s own. · The Cambridge Croquet Club, John F. Kennedy Memorial Park, 970 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Massachusetts.