

**UNITED STATES CROQUET ASSOCIATION
(USCA)**



**The Official Rules of
9 Wicket (Backyard) Croquet
Including
Challenging Options & FAQ's**

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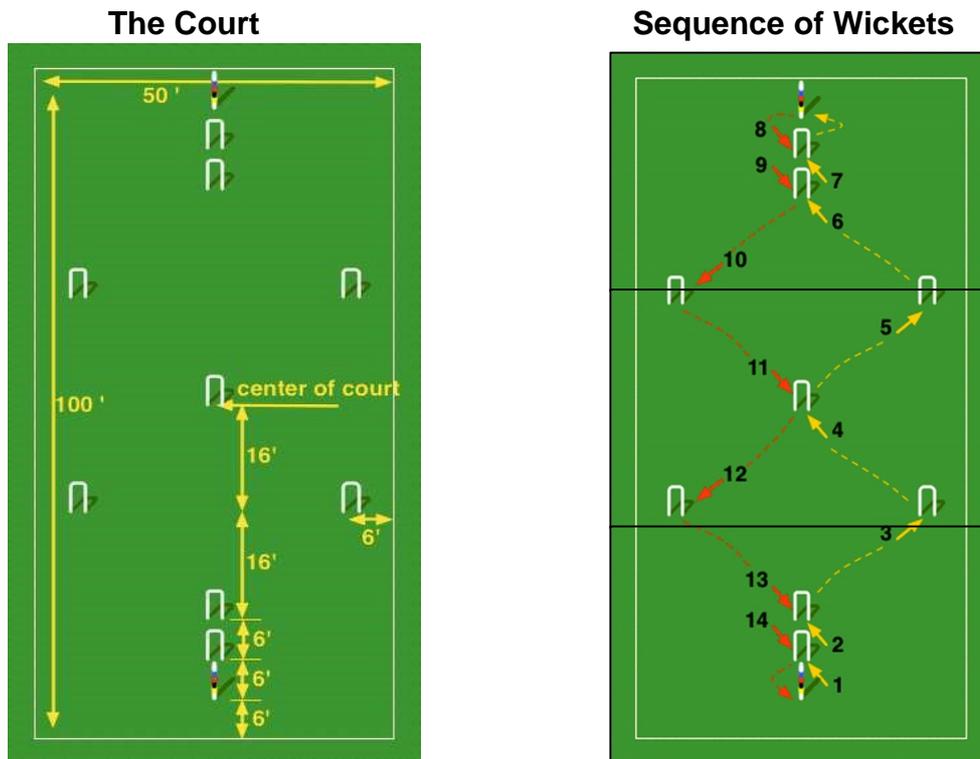
Welcome to the World's Greatest Backyard Sport!

The game of croquet (pronounced "crow-KAY") is a tradition of backyard recreation in America, as well as a sport that can be enjoyed by young and old alike. Whether you are a novice who plays the occasional friendly game or a determined competitor who gives opponents no quarter, you need to know the rules and have them handy for reference during a game. This special edition of the rules was prepared by the sport's governing body, the United States Croquet Association (USCA), as a guide for informal backyard play. It is the purpose of the USCA to offer croquet enthusiasts a standard set of rules with many options included. If a variation is to be used, it should be announced before the start of a game or in the case of a tournament, prior to its start.

You will find some challenging options for tournaments in the Challenging Options and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) in the Backyard Croquet Rules.

The USCA sanctions 9-wicket events throughout the year. The USCA 9W Committee requests that any sanctioned tournament uses the 9-wicket Basic Rules along with any Challenging Options from this document that the local organizers may wish to include. If there is more than one flight then the rules may differ between flights. If the sponsoring organization has specific rules, they would like to use that are not included in the USCA 9W Basic Rules/Options, then they should contact the USCA 9W committee well in advance of their event.

Basic Rules of 9 Wicket (Backyard) Croquet



A backyard croquet court doesn't have to be a perfectly manicured lawn, but short grass provides the best playing surface. If you have room, the official full-size court is a rectangle, 100 feet long by 50 feet wide. For backyard play you can adjust the size and shape of the court to fit the available space. Use string or chalk to mark definite boundaries if you choose, or just mark the corners with flags or stakes.

Wickets and Stakes

The nine wickets and two stakes are arranged in a double diamond pattern as shown in the above diagram. If you are playing on a smaller court, the distance shown should be scaled down in proportion to the length and width of the court. The wickets should be firmly planted in the ground, and the width of the wickets should be uniform throughout the court.

The Balls and Order of Play

In many croquet sets, there are six balls in these colors: Blue, Red, Black, Yellow, Green, and Orange. In a six-ball game, these colors are played in this order: Blue, Red, Black, Yellow, Green, and Orange. In a four-ball game they're played Blue, Red, Black, and Yellow. Assuming the manufacturer references the Official United States Croquet Association 9 Wicket Backyard Croquet Rules, those colors are marked from top to bottom on the two stakes included in the set.

The Mallets

Each player uses a mallet. Only the striking (end) face may be used to strike a ball, unless the players have agreed to allow the use of “side” shots or other shot-making variations.

Optional Accessories

You can use colored clips or clothespins to mark the next wicket your ball must go through. The clip is picked up when a wicket is scored, then placed on the ball's next wicket at the end of the turn. You can use string or “chalk” to mark boundaries of the court, or just designate “off the grass” as a boundary.

Object of the Game

The object of the game is to advance your ball through the course of wickets scoring points for each wicket and stake in the correct order and direction. The winner is the first side to complete the course with all its balls. In a timed game, if the time expires, the team with the most points at the end of the time period wins. This is known as “sudden stop”. If the score is tied, the ball closest to its contested wicket gets an extra point for the win.

Teams

The game is generally played by one side against the other. Here are some examples,

1) The “Singles” game is played between two players, each player playing with two balls: Blue/Black against Red/Yellow.

2) The “Doubles” game is played between two sides, each side consisting of two players. One team plays the blue/black balls and the other the red/yellow balls. Each player plays only one ball (the same color ball) throughout the game.

Some other examples of teaming up with six balls.

3) Three teams, two players, having two balls on each side: Blue/Yellow, Red/Green, and Black/Orange playing against one another.

4) Two teams, three players, having three balls on each side: Blue/Black/Green against Red/Yellow/Orange.

5) Two to six players playing against one another with one ball each (called “Cutthroat” see explanation below).

Cutthroat

Many croquet players like to play singles with only one ball per side (known as cutthroat) with the winner being the player who advances his or her ball around the court first. This popular variation is played with the same rules as regular singles or doubles croquet, but any number of players from two to six can play, each with their own ball. The colors may be drawn by lot to determine who plays what color ball (again, the order of play being Blue, Red, Black, Yellow, Green, and Orange throughout the game).

After all balls have started the game, play continues in the same order until a ball has staked out. The first ball to stake out is the winner. If the remaining players wish to continue, the balls continue in the same order, skipping the ball that has finished the course.

Starting point

All balls are played into the game from a spot halfway between the finishing stake and Wicket #1.

Shots

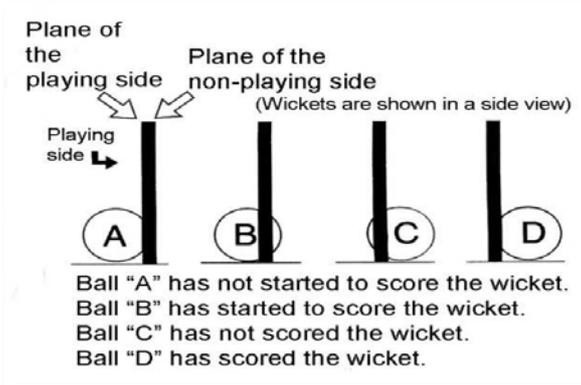
If a player plays out of turn, there is no penalty. Any ball moved during the out-of-turn play is replaced to its position prior to the error and play continues properly. If an out of turn is initially condoned (not discovered) but then later discovered, only the last ball played out of turn is replaced and the correct ball then proceeds. Example: if Red plays, then Blue plays, then Yellow plays and it's noticed that Yellow incorrectly played after Blue, Yellow is replaced, and then Red plays correctly.

If the striker takes a swing at his/her ball and misses entirely, the miss counts as a shot and the turn ends, unless the striker had a second "bonus" shot.

If the striker's mallet accidentally hits another ball other than the striker ball, the shot must be replayed, but with no loss of turn.

Scoring Wicket and Stake Points

Each ball can score wicket and stake points for its side only by going through a wicket or hitting a stake in the proper order and direction. Going through a wicket out of order or in the wrong direction is not counted as a point gained or lost. A ball caused to score its wicket or stake during another ball's turn earns the point for its side, but no bonus shot is earned as a result. A ball scores a wicket point only if it comes to rest clear of the playing side of the wicket. If a ball passes through a wicket but rolls back, it has not scored the wicket. If a ball travels backwards through its wicket to get position, it must be clear of the non-playing side to then score the wicket in the correct direction. Because wickets can be loose in the ground, it's best not to run the side if the mallet head up or down either plane of the wicket. It's always better to use your judgement sighting by eye.



Bonus Shots

The striker earns one bonus shot if the striker ball scores a wicket or hits the turning stake. The striker earns two bonus shots if the striker ball hits another ball (a "roquet"). You are "dead" on a ball for bonus shots until you clear your next wicket or on the start of your next turn whichever comes first. However, the maximum number of bonus shots earned by a striker is two; there is never a time when a striker is allowed three shots. (See the "Exceptions" section below for examples.)

If two bonus shots are earned by striking another ball, the first of these two shots may be taken in any of four ways:

1. From a mallet-head distance or less away from the ball that was roqueted ("taking a mallet head").
2. From a position in contact with the ball that was roqueted, with the striker ball held steady by the striker's foot or hand (a "foot shot" or "hand shot").
3. From a position in contact with the ball that was roqueted, (a "croquet shot").
4. From where the striker ball stopped after the roquet. (If a boundary is in use and the striker ball went out of bounds, the ball should be measured in one mallet length from where it crossed the boundary).

The second bonus shot after a roquet is an ordinary shot played from where the striker ball came to rest, called a "continuation shot".

Bonus shots may not be accumulated. Upon earning a bonus shot by scoring a wicket, hitting the turning stake, or roqueting another ball, any bonus shot previously earned is forfeited. For example, if a ball roquets a ball and in that same stroke the striker ball hits another ball, the second ball hit is not a roquet and remains where it comes to rest (with no deadness incurred on that ball).

Exceptions: Two bonus shots are earned when the striker ball scores two wickets in one shot. If the ball also hits the turning stake after scoring two wickets, two strokes are earned, not three. Conversely, if the striker ball scores the seventh wicket and hits the turning stake in the same shot, it earns two shots. After the striker ball roquets another

ball, it does not earn any bonus shots for hitting it again in the same turn before scoring the next wicket in order. However, there is no penalty for hitting the ball again.

Wicket and Roquet

When the striker ball scores a wicket and then in the same shot hits another ball, only the wicket counts and the striker has earned only the one bonus shot for scoring the wicket. The striker may then roquet any ball to earn two bonus shots. When the striker ball roquets another ball and then goes through a wicket, the wicket has not been scored but the striker earns two bonus shots for the roquet.

The Boundaries

If boundaries are established, whenever more than half of a ball (50%+) crosses the inside edge of a boundary, it is "Out of Bounds" and should be brought inbounds and placed one mallet length (or 36 inches) into the court. If players are using mallets of different lengths, agree to a common distance you'll measure in during the game. The ball should be placed 90 degrees inbounds and perpendicular to the line and not diagonally from the line. (*Exception*): When the striker ball has just roqueted (hit) another ball, the striker may choose to place it in contact with or up to a mallet-head from the ball that was roqueted.) All balls are also immediately brought in a mallet length from the boundary when they are less than that distance from the boundary, except for the striker's ball when the striker has a bonus shot.

If more than one ball crosses the boundary on the same spot, the striker may measure any ball inbounds first and then place the other(s) up to a mallet-head's length away from it on either side.

Rover Balls

After a ball scores all of the wickets in the course, its player may choose to keep it in the game as a "rover" to help advance that side's remaining ball(s) and to prevent the opposing side from advancing. During this ball's turn, it may roquet any other ball only once per turn, gaining bonus shots accordingly, but it does not earn any bonus shots or wicket points for running a wicket. Any player may put a rover out of the game by causing it to hit the finishing stake. The rover's side earns the point for the stake, and the order of play continues without the staked-out ball.

Time Limited Games

If time does not permit a game to be played to the stake, a time limit may be set beforehand. A kitchen timer works well to alert players to the end of the time. When the time limit is reached the game is over. This is known as "sudden stop". If the score is tied in the "sudden stop" format, the ball closest to its contested wicket gets an extra point for the win.

Challenging Optional Rules

All players in the game must consent to these optional rules before the start of the game. Any combination of options (none to all) may be chosen.

Option 1. Using Deadness

When the striker's ball hits (roquets) another ball in the game and then takes 2 bonus shots, it is then deemed to be 'dead' on that ball. It will remain "dead" on that ball for bonus shots until it clears its next wicket. This is referred to as 'carry over deadness'. If a striker roquets a ball he/she is dead on, all balls are replaced to their positions before the shot, and the turn is over.

Option 1A. Special Relief of Deadness

A side may clear one of its balls of deadness when the opponent makes the first wicket after the turning stake (the 8th wicket) so long as that side is behind in points (not tied) at the end of the opponent's turn.

Option 1B. Clearing Deadness

A side may clear one of its balls of deadness when the opponent makes the first wicket after the turning stake (the 8th wicket) regardless of score at the end of the opponent's turn.

Option 2A. Out of Bounds Play

A ball is considered out-of-bounds if it is more than halfway over the boundary line which is considered to be the inside edge of the boundary marking. Except in two cases which will be described below, if a striker sends any ball(s) out of bounds as the result of their shot, all balls shall be measured in 9" from the spot where they crossed the boundary line and the turn ends. The two exceptions to this are when the striker's ball crosses the boundary line as the result of a roquet or a striker ball directly hits any other ball out of bounds after it has roqueted a ball.

Option 2B. Out of Bounds Play (only to be used when there is no carryover deadness)

If a striker sends any ball(s) out of bounds (including the striker ball on a roquet) as a result of their shot, all balls that went out of bounds shall be replaced exactly on the inside edge of the boundary line where they went out and the turn ends. When two balls go out of bounds at the same spot, the first ball out is marked in and the second ball is placed 9 inches or less (but not in contact with) on either side of the first ball.

Option 3. Starting Deadness

No bonus shots are earned by hitting another ball until both the striker ball and the ball to be roqueted have cleared a designated wicket (typically #1, #2, or #3). A ball "not in the game" may have a ball(s) "in the game" marked and lifted for a shot – and vice versa. Balls "not in the game" are dead on balls "in the game" and vice versa.

Option 4. Wired (if Option #1 is being used)

If an opponent causes the striker ball to be blocked from all live balls by these obstacles: a wicket, stake or a ball(s) it is dead on (known as being wired), the striker may move their ball up to and including 9 inches in any direction from its wired position to enable a possible open shot on any live ball. Blocked/Wired means the ability to roquet any possible part of the ball if the obstacle was removed. The striker is not obligated to shoot at a ball from this new position and may take any shot they wish. This optional rule does not apply if the striker's side placed the striker ball in its current position, only if the opponent placed it there. If moving the ball 9 inches in any direction does not present an open shot, the striker may move the striker's ball a greater distance (but no greater distance than needed to gain an open shot on some live ball). This must be done without shortening the distance between their ball and the ball they wish to shoot at. Additionally, they must now shoot at that ball.

Option 5. Blocked at a Wicket by a Dead Ball (when Option #1 is used)

If an opponent causes a ball to be blocked from scoring its wicket by a dead ball(s) for two consecutive turns, the blocked ball becomes alive on the blocking ball(s). The opponent must be responsible for the block, not the side claiming a block. A block must be confirmed by the blocking side in order to be counted as a block, in order to avoid disputes. In addition, the proposed wicket shot that is claimed to be blocked must be possible to make to count as a block.

Option 6. Rover Play (when Option #1 is used)

A rover may roquet all balls once per turn; however, once the rover is dead on a ball(s), it must go through any wicket in any direction to clear its deadness on that ball(s). The rover does not get an additional (bonus) shot after going through this clearing wicket. If the rover goes through any wicket in any direction while dead on one or more balls (intentionally or not), the turn is over regardless of any additional shots remaining. Once a clearing wicket is made, the rover is alive on all balls in its next turn and may roquet them in any order.

Option 7. Poison

A poison ball is one that has scored all the wickets but hasn't hit the finishing stake. A poison ball may roquet any opponent ball and have it removed from the game. Conversely, if an opponent ball roquets a poison ball, the poison ball is removed from the game. If a poison ball fully passes through any wicket in any direction, it is removed from the game. A poison ball does not earn bonus shots for roqueting other balls. Poison is most often used in "cutthroat" croquet.

Option 8. Over Time Play

When a timed match has expired, each ball gets a last turn. If a ball has played its last stroke of the turn and is still rolling on the court when time expires, it will get another turn. If the losing side has played its last turns, the winning side may not play its last turn (aka last ball/last turn may not play). If the score is tied after the "last turn" round, the ball closest to its contested wicket gets a bonus point for the win. A tournament director may choose to use multiple last turns rounds (ideally, no more than two rounds).

Option 9. Ball in Hand

If the striker picks up the striker ball (other than measuring in the ball on the boundary line), they must use ways 1, 2, or 3 in the Bonus Shots section and way #4 is no longer available for taking the first bonus shot.

Option 10A. Non-Sequence Order of Play

On the opening turn, the sequence is Blue/Red/Black/Yellow (Green and Orange if six ball are used). After the opening turns have been completed, a side may choose to play either of their balls when it's their turn. The players must play the balls they started the game with. *Example: To start the game, Bill played Blue, John played Red, Fred played Black, and Mary played Yellow. After Yellow plays its first turn, the side may play either Blue or Black. If the side wants Black to play, it's Fred's turn.*

Option 10B. Non-Sequence Order of Play

On the opening turn, the sequence is Blue/Red/Black/Yellow (Green and Orange if six ball are used). After the opening turns have been completed, a side may choose to play either of their balls on their turn and the players must play in the same sequence they started the game with. *Example: To start the game, Bill played Blue, John played Red, Fred played Black, and Mary played Yellow. After yellow plays its first turn, it is now Bill followed by John, Fred, and Mary. Bill may play either Blue or Black.*

Option 11. Wicketed Ball

If the striker's ball becomes "wicketed" (stuck in the jaws of the wicket), the next player may not roquet the wicketed ball. If the opponent's ball roquets a wicketed ball, the balls are replaced and the opponents lose their next turn. The striker may cannon the wicketed ball with another ball without penalty. *Example: if Red is wicketed and then Black roquets Red, Red and Black are replaced, and then Yellow plays, Blue loses its turn, and then Red plays.*

Option 12. Lift

When the striker hits the turning stake, the opponents on their next turn may place their ball 9 inches away in any direction from the ball that hit the turning stake. *Example: Red hits the turning stake and finishes its turn on a side boundary. If the next side to play wishes, it may place their ball 9 inches from Red in any direction (but not place itself out of bounds)*

Option 13. Roqueted Ball Becomes Ball in Hand

After roqueting a ball, the striker may lift the roqueted ball and place it in contact with the striker's ball. *Please note the striker must strike only their ball.*

Frequently Asked Questions

Balls

Q1: "At the start of the game, is it better to go first or last?"

A: It depends on court conditions and the skill level of the players. Assuming Beginner or Intermediate skill level, it's generally better to go last because the more balls in front of you, the more options you have in using those balls.

Q2: "If my ball roquets a live ball and then goes through its wicket, what happens next?"

A: You earn two shots and the wicket doesn't count.

Q3: "If my ball is put through its wicket by an opponent, do I get credit for scoring that wicket?"

A: Yes.

Q4: "When is a ball through a wicket?"

A: See the diagram and discussion in the "Scoring Wicket and Stake Points" section.

Q5: "What happens if I miss my ball entirely on a shot?"

A: It counts as a shot, and if you had only one shot when you missed, your turn ends.

Q6: "Is there a rule that says you are 'dead' (not allowed to hit it) on a ball you've hit until you make your next wicket?"

A: Yes, see Option 1.

Q7: "At what point can I start roqueting other balls and earning bonus shots?"

A: Once the first ball has finished its first turn. That means after blue has finished its first turn, red and the remaining balls can strike it and start earning bonus shots immediately (unless Option 3 is used).

Q8: "What happens if I hit a ball I'm dead on?"

A: When Option 1 is in effect, all balls are replaced and the turn is over. If Option 1 is not being used, there is no penalty for hitting a dead ball; however, you don't get two shots for that hit.

Q9: "If my ball is right up against a wicket or the turning stake, can I just hit the back of the stake or wicket and hope that knocks my ball forward?"

A: No. Your mallet head must strike the ball.

Q10: "Can I keep playing after my ball passes through all the wickets and hits the stake?"

A: No. Once either you or an opponent causes your ball to hit the finishing stake (after you have made all the wickets), you must remove your ball from the court and your ball may not be played anymore. If you do not hit the finishing stake, you may continue playing, either as a rover or as poison, depending on which rules are used in the game.

Q11: "Can a rover ball shoot through a wicket and earn two shots for roqueting a live ball?"

A: Yes, unless Option 6 is being used.

Q12: If I roquet a ball and pick up my ball (ball in hand), can I put it back down in its original position to take my first bonus shot?

A: Yes. If Challenging Option 9 is in effect, then the answer is No. You must use way 1, 2 or 3 once you pick up the striker ball after a roquet for taking the first bonus shot.

Bonus Shots

Q13: "Can I really use my hand or foot to hold my ball while hitting it and knocking another ball away?"

A: Yes, if you have roqueted a live ball earning two shots.

Q14: "When you send another ball away by a foot shot or hand shot, do you lose your second bonus stroke if your ball also moves after hitting it?"

A: No, you just play your ball from where it comes to rest.

Q15: " Do I get three bonus shots if my ball roquets another ball and goes through its wicket on the same shot?"

A: No.

Q16: "What happens when, after receiving two bonus shots, my first bonus shot clears a wicket? Do I still have two bonus shots or just one?"

A: You have one shot for scoring the wicket.

Boundary Line

Q17: "If I send a ball over the boundary, is there a penalty?"

A: No (unless you use Option 2A or 2B).

Q18: "When you go out of bounds, do you have to place your ball back in bounds immediately or can you wait until your turn?"

A: You must immediately place your ball back in bounds.

Q19: "When placing your ball back in bounds, do you have to place it 90 degrees inbounds to the line at the point it went out or at any angle at the point it went out?"

A: The ball must be placed perpendicular and not at a diagonal angle from where it went more than halfway over the boundary line.

Q20: "What happens if more than one ball crosses the boundary on the same spot?"

A: The striker may measure any ball inbounds first and then place the other(s) up to and including a mallet head length away from it on either side (but not in contact with the other ball).

Q21: "May I choose not to use a boundary?"

A: In informal play, yes. In USCA sanctioned tournament play, no.

Mallets

Q22: "Is there any particular way that I must hold the mallet and hit the ball?"

A: You may hold the mallet however you wish but must strike the ball with the end face of the mallet head, not the side of it.

Q23: "What if I strike my mallet into another ball accidentally?"

A: The shot must be replayed correctly with no loss of turn.

Q24: "If I have a mallet head that is round, while my ball is up against the turning stake, may I just run my mallet head downward between the stake and the ball in order to move the ball as my shot?"

A: No.

Turn

Q25: "What happens when someone plays out of turn? Is there a penalty?"

A: No, but once the out-of-turn play is discovered, you must replace the ball that last played out of turn and have the correct ball play. (See the out of turn rule in the basic rules section for an example).

Wickets

Q26: "Do I have to go through the wickets in any particular order?"

A: Yes, you must follow the double-diamond pattern and go through the wickets in order of their numbers, i.e., wicket 1, then 2, then 3, etc. (See Sequence of Wickets diagram).

Q27: "If my ball goes through a wicket and then hits another ball on the same shot, what happens next?"

A: In this case, you have earned one extra shot for the wicket, (the first incident) but the roquet on the other ball is ignored. You may choose to roquet that ball

again on the continuation shot to earn two extra shots, but you aren't required to do so.

Miscellaneous

Q28: "Is there a variation of croquet called 'Poison'?"

A: Yes, and its definition varies widely. Fundamentally, poison is a ball that has made all the wickets and tries to eliminate the opponent's balls from the game by roqueting (hitting) them. However, if poison is roqueted by an opponent ball or if it should go through any wicket in any direction, poison loses and is put out of the game.

Q29: "May I create my own rules and variations for croquet?"

A: Yes, this is done all the time; however, it is the purpose of the USCA to offer croquet enthusiasts a standard set of rules with many options included. If a variation is to be used, it should be announced before the start of a game or in the case of a tournament, prior to its start.

Q30: "What happens if something occurs that is not covered in the rule book?"

A: The players in the game should try to decide the issue and carry on. If that is impossible, the striker shall rule until the USCA is contacted for an official ruling.

Q31: Are there mallet faults in the USCA 9 wicket tournaments?

A: Yes, In the spirit of the game, for mallet faults, the tradition in past national championships has been that there are no faults in the usual USCA sense...that is, incidental double-taps and crushes were allowed. The only thing not allowed in the past has been intentionally steering the ball (shepherding) where the mallet swing clearly deviates from the original line of swing after contact. Accidental contact between the mallet and another ball (not the striker ball) has sometimes been a "put the ball back and continue your turn" resolution and sometimes an end-of-turn fault.

Q32: Are Referees required in a tournament game?

A: No. The players can act as referees of the game. In singles, the striker makes the final decision but must consult with the adversary and in doubles play, all four players can act as referees of the game with the final decision by the striker. When an adversary is not watching the striker, they cease to be a referee of the game.

Q33: In timed games, what happens if the sides are tied in points?

A: (a) In "sudden stop" when the time expires, the side whose ball is closest to any part of its contested wicket gets a point for the win. (b) See Option 8.

Q34: What happens if my ball gets stuck in a wicket?

A: The turn is over if the striker has no additional shots however if the ball is stuck because it is touching both uprights from the striker's last shot, the problem is remedied and the striker gets to take the shot over if they wish.

Q35: How can I become a member of the United States Croquet Association?

A: You can join the USCA organization and learn to play over 4 different types of croquet. A USCA membership offers you the ability to connect with other players and clubs throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Association offers training camps, videos, qualified coaches and referees to help you improve and develop your club's program and facilities.

More information can be found by writing or calling our office at:

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