

# 6 Hoops Northwest

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*Bob Imhoff watches Peter Rassenti during the 2014 Vancouver Open at West Point Grey. — Photo M. Dowling*

## ***Croquet at West Point Grey***

*A Brief History by Russell Uhler*

*After our latest issue of 6 Hoops, Michael Dowling suggested we write about the history of croquet's development in British Columbia. The following article by Vancouver's Russell Uhler gets us started. Russell, who has himself served as president of the Vancouver Croquet Club, wrote the article for inclusion in a 50-year time capsule being sealed at West Point Grey Lawn Bowling Club this month.*



In early 1989 a letter arrived at the West Point Grey Lawn Bowling Club (WPGLBC) asking that the Vancouver Croquet Club (VCC) be allowed to use one of the lawns for 6-wicket croquet. This generated considerable debate at subsequent meetings of club directors as to its advisability; much of the discussion having to do with damage to the lawn from wickets (hoops), players' shoes, and misdirected swings of croquet mallets. One prominent member of the club threatened to resign if croquet was allowed, which he eventually did when the directors voted to approve the application. Perhaps the rather hefty first year user fee of \$5000 was a factor in their decision.

That letter of application was signed by Brian Wasylyk, who along with Bob Imhoff and Linda Ferris, founded croquet at the WPGLBC. The three founders had only recently taken up 6-wicket croquet after playing 9-wicket croquet down the hill on the grass at Jericho Beach across from the hostel. They had also just completed a training course and some competitive play at the United States Croquet Association training centre in West Palm Beach, Florida, where they learned more about American Rules 6-wicket croquet.

This was the game that was being played when I arrived late in the summer of 1998 and first met some of the other initial club members — Ben Houston, Ruth Nichol, Mary Banham and Hettie Bond. Ruth, Mary and Hettie had come from Brock House where croquet was played on the grass surrounding the clubhouse. Over the years, Brock House was to be a source of many VCC players. Arriving in early years were Freddy Foster, Vasant Kalyanpur, Hal Linberg, Angie Kaye and others, and in later years, Margaret Hyslop, Marie Pryce and Barbara Wallace. Marie helped immensely in administration and teaching programs during her membership. In addition, when I first arrived I also met John Adams, Chris Percival-Smith, Pablo Coffee, Walker Fanning, Steve Dimond, and others whose names have now slipped my mind. I remember Chris in particular because he was the club's best player and because of the time he spent helping others to improve their play. John Adams spent countless hours playing singles with me in the beginning. We are still playing today, nearly 25 years later.



*The Clubhouse at West Point Grey during the 2006 Vancouver Open.*

In the initial 1989 season the re-minted VCC set about establishing itself on the international croquet scene by holding the first of many "Vancouver Open" tournaments at WPG. The players came mainly from BC, Washington and Oregon but occasionally there were players from farther afield. Because it was the main croquet game played in North America at the time, initially these tournaments were American Rules (AR) 6-wicket croquet but over the years they changed to Association Croquet (AC) tournaments which was the game most widely played outside of North America.

The transition to AC started with some members (who were sick and tired of the "deadness board") playing AC outside of scheduled play, often under the lights on the West Lawn into early morning hours. The transition was also due to the arrival of Derrick Robinson, who had played AC in Ireland and later in Quebec, but it was also part of the same trend that was occurring in clubs in the American West where they increasingly embraced AC over AR. In 2006 I played my first AC with Derrick and thoroughly enjoyed it. The year 2011 was the first of several years the Pacific Cup AC tournament was held at WPG, further attesting to the increasing popularity of AC.

Golf Croquet, which is now the most popular croquet game in the world, began to be played at WPG at about the same time. It was Pablo's favourite game. He and Ben played it endlessly, eventually pulling other members into their fold. Today, at WPG we rarely ever play AR and even AC is played regularly by only a few players. Of course, we still play Golf Croquet but the current rage here and in all of BC is Snake-in-the-Grass

Croquet, or Snake for short. Snake is a variant of Golf Croquet invented by Pierre Dunn by making some simple but important changes to Golf Croquet rules. Pierre was VCC President in 2011 when membership reached its all time high of 30 members. Pierre and I played an early version of Snake at WPG before he moved to Victoria, where the game has blossomed and lawn bowling clubs have increasingly added croquet to their programs.

Since this writing will go into the new WPGLBC 50-year 2021 time capsule, it seems appropriate to make at least one prediction for future members and guests to chuckle about when the capsule is opened in the year 2071. My prediction is: from its WPG origin, Snake Croquet will spread to be played worldwide and there will be a world championship competition as there currently is for Association Croquet and Golf Croquet. But if it happens at all it probably will happen well before 2071.

I have written about the transition in croquet games played at WPG over the years and named some of the people who played them but before I close I must mention the transition in the VCC itself. In 2017, with membership having fallen to only 6, it was unanimous that we make an even stronger effort than we had in earlier years to amalgamate with the WPGLBC, and in 2018, under the helpful leadership of President Charles Hou, it was done. This was a somber end to an organization responsible for bringing 6-wicket croquet to Vancouver but it was our belief that it was for the best. VCC membership had been declining steadily since 2011 and we thought that being able to offer an all-inclusive package for the same fee that included both croquet and lawn bowling along with other benefits, including insurance coverage, would increase the number of croquet players.

Since amalgamation, there has been a sharp revival in our numbers to currently stand at 22 players (8 are also bowlers), so seemingly it has worked. However, we will keep our fingers crossed that it is not just an effect arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the VCC no longer exists as a croquet club playing at WPG, the memory of it lives on in this brief history and in both private and public records elsewhere.

## *Cautious Return to Action*

Here comes Delta — like a rolling fogbank.

What kinds of activities are going to be possible over the next few months? So much depends on how vicious the Delta variant of the Covid virus turns out to be, and where it takes hold, and how willing people are to take the precautions necessary to maintain control. It's really hard to see much beyond tomorrow.

But let's try. If we make plans and they don't work out because restrictions are re-introduced, we'll feel a little disappointment as we scrap them. If we don't make plans and it turns out that we could have been out on the lawn enjoying competition with both current and new friends, we may feel a substantially higher level of frustration. So I say plan now, and cancel if we must.

For example: There has also been some informal discussion of a Western Canada Association Croquet tournament in October that would provide competitive opportunities for our BC players of all levels, and



*Kathy Moi and Brent Jansen celebrate their win in the VLBC Intermediate Snake Doubles.*

perhaps draw in some challengers from the far side of the Rockies. Please share your feedback on this possibility — and on how your club might be involved — by talking with the croquet organizers at your club.

One more option being discussed is a Snake competition bringing together players from all of BC's Snake-playing clubs. How would this work? Would each club have an internal competition and then send their best to the "regional" tournament? Or would this be an Open that anyone from any club could enter, without concern for club affiliation? Again, take with your local club croqueters and get your two cents' worth passed on to whoever ends up carrying this forward.

Several competitions filled the calendar on Vancouver Island since our last issue. Here are a few results:

At Victoria LBC, intermediate Snake players met in a doubles contest on June 24, with the team of Brent Jansen and Kathy Moi coming away with real wine and a virtual trophy.

The VLBC Advanced Snake Singles competition



took place on July 10. Barely scrabbling into the final ladder after questionable play in the opening round robin, Pierre Dunn hung on to meet and defeat Peter Rassenti in the final, 7-5. Every player had periods of excellent play, and anyone could have come out on top.

July 29 brought the Victoria LBC Hi-Lo Snake Doubles, open to all club members. Less experienced players were paired with more experienced players to even out the competition. Rolf Bertsch and Carole Costello proved teamwork is the key and crushed the opposition.

On August 2, Canadian Pacific LBCC held its Ray Turner Classic. Named for a past president who had a significant impact on the club's character and direction, the event paired bowlers and croquet players into teams that competed in both bowls and croquet. The team members changed for each game. Harry Walker walked tall to finish as the only competitor with four wins. Other top finishers were Johanna Carlow, Chris Gallant, and Mike Holt. The Classic was designed as a way for bowlers and croquet players to get better acquainted, and ended in smiles all around. Gordon Folka and Pierre Dunn shared direction.

Campbell River called three South Islanders northwards to compete in Singles AC with host Brian Wasylyk on August 11 and 12. Brian's refurbished but smaller court played well, and all in attendance enjoyed their round robin play. Chris Percival-Smith won all five of his games, Michael Dowling won three of five, Pierre Dunn won two, and Brian brought up the rear.

August 12 also saw the Victoria LBC's Novice Doubles competition, played with teammates changing for each game. Coming out of the scramble on top was John Binsted, who also had the shot of the day when he ran 1-back and 2-back with a single stroke. Donna Del Torre served as TD

Golf was the order of the day at Canadian Pacific LBCC on August 22, when the club's Singles Golf championship was held. Lorne Oakes and Pierre Dunn emerged from the round robin with two wins each while Chris Percival-Smith and Mike Holt had one each. Pierre held on grimly over the course of a long final game to come out on top over Lorne. Chris handled tournament direction.



*John Binsted takes Novice Doubles at VLBC, with Sandy Hodel and Norma Alison close behind.*

### ***Coming Up Soon:***

August 26: Advanced Snake Doubles. Snake in the Grass. Open to VLBC players only. Choose your own partner. Contact Peter Rassenti at <

September 17 - 19: Pacific Cup. Advanced Association Croquet. King City, OR lawn bowling club if available; if the venue is still closed due to the pandemic, the event will be played at The Resort at the Mountain, Welches, OR. Entry limited to 8 players. Contact Patrick Sweeney, TD, for entry or further information, at <sweeney@503law.com>.

Under consideration are open competitions in AC and Snake sometime this fall. The Victoria area clubs will have to get together to agree on who will host and when, in order for this to come about.

## ***Recent Developments in the Region***

While we travel carefully from house to club and back again, treading lightly across the Covid-saturated landscape, we don't see much going on outside our immediate vicinity. But there's action afoot.

In Metchosis, Michael Dowling's Happy Valley Croquet Club has lost its courts. Before you sigh sadly, though, be advised that this was by Michael's choice — he dug up the courts he had to prepare for a full-size court to replace them. Where there was a rather daunting, rolling court, there are now much more rolling heaps of dirt. Michael will be leveling the soil, topping with sand, leveling some more, doing a little more leveling, seeding the result, and hopefully by springtime will have a fine new court ready for play. Michael has been building up the membership in his Happy Valley club, and is always interested in visits from those looking for a new place to play — at least, when his court is ready for use. He can be reached at <michael@happyvalleylavender.com>.

North Delta, south of Vancouver, is another unlikely place to hear from, but with luck it won't be unlikely for long. I've recently been in contact with Abolfazl Valikhani, who is beginning the difficult process of establishing a working (or playing) relationship with a local lawn bowling club. Valikhani moved to North Delta from Vancouver fairly recently, but before that he and his brother managed the far more difficult task of bringing croquet to a whole country. The two of them were the central players in the creation of the Iran Croquet Association, which established several clubs and obtained membership for their association in the World Croquet Federation. Valikhani also spent time in eastern Canada, where he played in and won several competitions. He's now being considered for the Golf Croquet team Canada will field for the next World Championships. Having him in the Northwest will be a boost to the development of Golf Croquet and our plans to bring serious tournament play to our area.

## Mallets Aforethought - 1

### *Reviewing Skills and Tactics*

You can study tactics 'til the cows come home; you can strategize until your brain fogs over; but no matter what kind of croquet you play, if you can't use your mallet to get your ball where you want it, success ain't gonna come waltzin' down that pike.

So for everyone who has learned how to handle their mallet effectively — and for everyone who hasn't — this column will review basic techniques and effective habits that will, with a little practice, provide useful results.

First, let's look at *how you're going to grip your mallet*. There are three basic grips: the Solomon, the Standard, and the Irish. In all three cases, you generally place your dominant hand (your writing or throwing hand) below the other hand. This is not a requirement, but it generally leads to greater success.



For the Solomon grip, you approach the mallet with both thumbs pointing upwards; the "V" where your thumb meets the rest of your hand is behind the mallet shaft; and the knuckles of your forefinger are above the knuckles of your pinky on the mallet shaft. It is not usually a good idea to put your thumb upright on the back of the shaft — this can place stress on your wrist when you use follow-through . . . and follow-through is important.





For the Standard grip, your upper hand is the same as for the Solomon, but your lower hand has the thumb pointed downward; the "V" of your lower thumb is on the front of the shaft; and your lower hand's pinky knuckles are above those of your forefinger.



For the Irish grip, both thumbs point downward; the "V" of your thumbs is on the front of the shaft; the pinky knuckles of both hands are above the forefinger knuckles.

It's immediately clear that different players find different grips effective. I can't bend my wrists far enough back to get a good backswing with the Irish grip, but I get a good swing with the Solomon. Other players find their hands blocking their view of their ball when they use the Solomon grip, but can see clearly with the Standard or the Irish. Some players have had wrist problems as a result of accidents, arthritis, or other difficulties. The grip that is the most comfortable and doesn't lead to pain after an hour's play is clearly preferable to those that leave you hurting.

Once you've found a grip that you can use with some satisfaction, it is time to figure out where to stand when you're going to swing at the ball.

Where you place your feet depends on several things. Most important is the fact that the best results usually happen if your mallet head is parallel to the surface when it contacts the ball. If you hit the ball at a



*parallel to the surface*



*hitting down*



*hitting up*

downward angle, you increase the spin on your ball, and the increased effect of the lawn on your swing can cause you to be more off-target if your mallet head is slightly angled to begin with. In addition, if you are shooting your ball at another ball not far away, your ball can actually jump slightly, bounce over the other ball, and not transfer the energy into it you were counting on. If you hit the ball as your mallet starts its rising arc — in other words, when it is pointed slightly upward — you lose spin, which is especially critical for hoop shots.

There are useful times to hit slightly down or up on your ball, but only to achieve certain effects. For the most part, you want a smooth shot that hits the center of the ball with the center of your mallet face when your mallet head is parallel to the ground.

So, where do you stand to get that good shot? Here's a technique for figuring out what's right for you: If you stand your mallet up right behind your ball, your mallet head is parallel to the ground. Step back behind the mallet, and place your hands in front of you in your normal grip position. If you use the Solomon grip, your forearms are extending to the front, almost parallel to the ground themselves. If you use the Irish grip, your forearms are reaching down toward the ground, and extend a much shorter distance in front of you. For the Standard grip, your arms extended at an angle between the positions of the other two grips.

If you step up to your mallet and stop when your hands are in a position to hold the mallet comfortably, you can look down at your feet and see approximately where they should be when you are ready to hit the ball a short distance. If you try positioning yourself for the different grips, you'll see that you have to come several inches closer to the mallet for a good Irish grip stance than you do for the Solomon grip. Again, the Standard grip stance is somewhere between the other two. In the pictures below, you can see that my foot position for the Irish grip is several inches closer to the ball than my position for the Solomon.



*approaching with Solomon grip*



*with Irish grip*



*with Standard grip*

In other words, there is no single ideal foot position. Your foot position depends on your grip. But that's not all. When you hit a long, cross-court shot, your arms tend to extend farther from your body as part of your "bigger" swing. If you want the mallet to be parallel to the ground when it makes contact, you'll have to be standing farther back from the ball for this longer shot. If you want to make a stop shot, you do want to hit upward on the ball. Again, you need to stand a little further back than you would for a more standard shot. When you're near a hoop but at an angle, you want to increase the spin on the ball so that it keeps trying to roll through after it first makes contact with the hoop. To do this, you want to hit down on the ball, as you would for a jump. To make this work, you have to stand closer to the ball.





*foot position with Solomon grip*



*with Irish grip*



*with Standard grip*



In the photos above, Donna is hitting a ball a long distance, so she is standing quite significantly further back from the ball. As she swings, she stretches forward with her arms, and by the time the mallet reaches the ball the mallet head is parallel to the surface.

In row of pictures below, Donna is playing a stop shot in the first image and jumping in the last two. Her foot position is similar to that for the long shot shown in the top row of pictures, but she's not stretching as much with her arms. As a result, the mallet head is past the bottom of its swing when it reaches the ball and is hitting up at it. In the final two pictures, Donna's foot position is so far forward that her toes are actually forward of the ball. This means the mallet will reach the ball before the head is at the bottom of the swing, and the angle will be downward. Donna's position is good for jumping over a ball, which can be very useful. If she simply wanted to put forward spin on the ball, her feet might not be quite so far forward, but she'd still be hitting at a downward angle.





The best way to figure out your foot position is to use the walk-up-and-grip-your-mallet test to start with, then adjust your position for special purposes. Practice these. Have a partner watch your longer shots, your hoop shots, and your stop shots, and try to tell you when you're hitting level, hitting down, or hitting up. Working on this a little bit can help you find a more effective stance and get used to settling into it automatically during play.

*Photos by D. Del Torre and P. Dunn*

### *A Note from the Editor*

The world of Croquet is fairly small, which has benefits as well as drawbacks. If you're a croquet player and visit a club in another country, you'll probably be welcomed with open arms by an instant group of new friends. On the other hand, getting action going in your own community can be difficult. We have to stick together to see our sport provide the opportunities that make playing a constantly fresh experience.

Most croquet clubs in the Pacific Northwest are closely connected to lawn bowling clubs. These clubs hold internal bowling competitions, but some of the most-enjoyed events are those that bring members from a number of clubs together. Sometimes the competitions are between teams representing the clubs, and sometimes they are regional competitions between individual players.

To really get the most out of croquet, we need to develop the same kind of interactivity. Just as we began to increase the number of clubs, though, the pandemic hit and kept us all from competing outside our home clubs. However, things are loosening up again, and now is the time for the croquet players and the clubs where they play to get together and start planning competitions between clubs, and between players from several clubs. Getting to know new players, having a chance to observe other techniques, sharing notes about equipment and the logistics of sharing space with bowlers — all of these are important to keeping the community thriving. Urge your club to get active in discussing options with other clubs and setting up an interesting schedule for competition. You'll be glad you did.

As noted in previous issues, this is a private venture. No organization is backing this publication. Any mistakes are my own. And when I make mistakes, let me know. And when you have better information than I've provided, let me know. And if you want to let off steam about the way something is being handled in the Northwest croquet world, send me a Letter to the Editor that I can print in the next issue.

## Useful Contacts

Here are just a few of the internet sites that can be useful to croquet players in a variety of ways — some provide information about how to play, others offer details of upcoming competitions, a few discuss rules questions or give access to equipment providers, some list results from tournaments around the world, and some may help you find people to play with when you travel to new lands. More items in coming issues.

### Organizations

Croquet Canada: <[www.croquet.ca](http://www.croquet.ca)>

United States Croquet Association: <<https://www.croquetamerica.com/>>

World Croquet Federation: <<https://worldcroquet.org/>>

### Information

Oxford: <<http://www.oxfordcroquet.com/index.asp>>

Croquet Records (Association Croquet players' results and standings): <<http://www.croquetrecords.com/>>

### Commercial Equipment Providers

Oakley Woods' Croquet Store: <<https://www.oakleywoods.com/>>

## Need a Mallet?

Finding croquet equipment can be difficult. To try to help, we're going to post notices for players selling items or looking to buy them. Below are the first few offerings.

First, Marie's Morford Mallet, the formidable Triple-M, pictured to the right. Bob Morford, one of the croquet forces to be reckoned with in Palm Springs, California, worked with several-time U.S. champion Ben Rothman to develop the mallet Ben now uses as he competes around the world. Morford followed up with variations to that original design, and Vancouver's Marie Pryce managed to get one of these pieces of fine craftsmanship. Marie is pulling back from active croquet play after years of fun and service, and wants to make her mallet, pictured here, available to a good home. The mallet has a 36" handle and 11" head with brass inlay, and weighs 2 lbs 8 oz. The original price paid was \$600 US.

Marie also has a copy of James Hawkins' *Complete Croquet*, an excellent source of information about croquet and how to play it.

If you're interested and want more information about Marie's items, or want to make an offer, contact me at <[breakrunner@vancroquet.com](mailto:breakrunner@vancroquet.com)>.

There are also two more mallets available at steal prices. One is a slightly-shorter-than-standard mallet of a very down-to-earth sort, and the other has an ergonomically-designed handle of a type developed by Idaho player Peter Bach. Bach, an A-rated US player, developed his bent-wood grip to take stress off of players' wrists.

Both mallets are about half an inch under the usual 3-foot height of most mallets. The value of buying the first mallet for \$50 comes from two facts — the price is low, and when you play consistently with one mallet you develop consistent skills. The second mallet is particularly suited to players who want to use a standard grip but find holding a conventional mallet hard on the wrists. This mallet can be yours for \$125. It will take a little getting used to, but can help some





players find the road to success.

Again, contact me at <breakrunner@vancroquet.com>.

Whether you want to sell some equipment or have a need for some croquet items, send me a note and we'll spread the word.

## Coming Soon!!!

Upcoming issues will review the Croquet Canada liability insurance coverage, the development of a handicap system for Golf Croquet and Snake, basic Snake tactics, the joys of croquet craftsmen, more history of croquet in the Northwest, snarky remarks from the editor, reports of your croquet success, and so on and so forth. If you aren't on the mailing list, contact me, and we'll include you in!

## Guess Who

Huge prizes may be won by whoever guesses who these croquet players are. Or maybe not. We're certainly willing to acknowledge your prowess in print. Who are these famous croqueters?



**A**



**B**

