

6 Hoops Northwest

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Oak Bay players use the near lawn while bowlers play on the other — Photo D. Anderson

Croquet Grows Quickly in BC

Way, way back at the Dawn of Time — in 2016 — there were two tournament-quality croquet courts on Vancouver Island that were maintained for croquet play. One was in Campbell River, where Brian Wasylyk had a full-size court and lived the lonely life of a croquet player with no competition for miles in any direction. The other was at the Canadian Pacific Lawn Bowling Club, where around 20 players shared a lawn with around 80 bowlers.

Five years later, there are six courts and around 120 players. What happened?

In 2016, the Victoria Lawn Bowling Club responded positively to an overture made by a group of players from the Canadian Pacific club. Not only would offering croquet provide the VLBC's current membership a wider variety of activities for the membership dollars, it would also attract new members with new membership dollars. The existence of two solid clubs in Victoria would allow for interclub competition and would develop

players for regional and national competition as well. Providing more options to a growing membership could also make grant applications stronger. It would be a win/win.

At least, it would be a win if the hopes for VLBC's recruiting program bore fruit. And they did. The club hoped to find 20 croquet players, and it ended up training close to 40 in its first year. They didn't all stay, but a solid number has remained, and new prospects are trained every year, easily replacing those who drift away. In the spring of 2021, VLBC has 54 croquet players, some 21 of whom are also bowlers. And they haven't even started the year's membership drive.

The success of VLBC's program, added to the continuing program at Canadian Pacific, helped encourage interest at other Victoria area lawn bowling clubs. First, the VicWest LBC requested help with equipment and training. After they'd been up and running for several months, the Gordon Head LBC asked for assistance, and now the Oak Bay LBC has joined the group.



Brent Jansen shoots a hoop at Gordon Head LBC — photo P. Dunn

Why all this interest? The news was spread by bowlers, of course. Not only were they finding that croquet players didn't damage the lawns, they also found a number of bowlers enjoying the new activity. That opened the door, but why have the numbers of players in Victoria who don't bowl been growing? One probable reason is that Victoria is growing as a retirement community. People move to the area from all over Canada, and find themselves looking for social activities that can replace those they left behind. Recruiting croquet players can be very difficult in areas where players have established social connections. Croquet in Victoria is proving an enjoyable part of taking a second run at life.

The Covid pandemic has also had an interesting role to play in the growth of croquet. With so many indoor activities closed down for long periods, people looking for healthy activities outdoors took a fresh look at croquet. You play outdoors, the activity doesn't require close contact between players, and you can still be social.

Another reason croquet has been able to grow in BC is that Croquet Canada has been more active in Western Canada recently, notably in the area of providing support to new clubs. When Gordon Head LBC indicated it needed support, Croquet Canada decided to dedicate about \$3000 to equipment that could be provided to West Coast clubs under the terms of its two-year loan program, already supplying equipment in the East. Half of the equipment purchased went to Gordon Head and the other half to a new club being started in West Vancouver at the West Vancouver LBC. Both clubs spent another \$1500 each on equipment, matching the amount of equipment received under the loan program, and they now have enough to put up two small courts on a bowling club lawn, making a play area for 16 players at a time (8 per court, double-banked).

Oak Bay joined the ranks of the croquet-playing clubs after the loan program's equipment was all farmed out, but that didn't stop them. A core of enthusiasts went to several of the club members to ask for donations,

and they gathered enough to outfit the club with plenty of equipment, and they, too, are now putting 16 players on the courts on croquet days.



*Brian's court in Campbell River
— Photo B. Campbell*



*Trying the new equipment at the West Vancouver LBC
— Photo TBD*

In the meantime, British Columbia's established courts carry on. The old Vancouver Croquet Club has become a part of the West Point Grey LBC, and the Dunbar LBC is also active. The Canadian Pacific LBC has become the CPLBCC, adding "Croquet" to its official name, and the Victoria LBC fills two lawns with croquet players on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week. VicWest LBC has a dedicated core.

Up in Campbell River, Brian Campbell took out his original court when he sold his house and half his property, but he built a new, smaller house on the second half, and a new, smaller court to go with it, and play is picking up again. No, he's not using a new, smaller mallet.

Given all this activity, it's only a matter of time (and Covid protocol adjustments) before we begin to see a burst of interclub competition. But let's look at that below.

Post-Covid Croquet Play

The pandemic has thrown a colossal monkey wrench into planning both for last year and for this year. Clubs in BC are for the most part restricted to scheduling their own internal events, as visiting other clubs is still off limits for health reasons. Still, there are some promising signs for more activity.

One way that clubs can prepare for expanded competition is to call some events "Opens" — this would mean that everyone allowed by the authorities to enter could enter. If the limitation is to club members, so be it; but if an Open is scheduled for a date that the authorities later declare is approved for interclub play, then members of other clubs could also enter.

Traditionally, croquet tournaments have been individual events. Clubs haven't been in the practice of sending teams to other clubs, but this is partly because players have been too thin on the ground. With greater numbers of players at each club and the clubs in close enough proximity to each other that travel and

accommodations become a factor, it's possible to set up competitions between clubs, or citywide competitions, or even such things as provincial championships.

Last year, there was a plan afoot for West Coast Snake-in-the-Grass players to descend on Bayfield, Ontario's Bayfield International Croquet Club for an East-meets-West competition. Covid quickly kicked that plan into the bushes, but the possibility for another crack at it is beginning to loom on the horizon. Bayfield ICC has already had their first Snake tournament of the year, with 24 entrants, and they have said they're strongly considering an "Open" for the fall. That means that if we can fly around the country by then, some of us Westerners can join them on the field of combat. Setting up a more formal East-West challenge may have to wait until 2022, but it may be possible to start getting to know each other!

As *6 Hoops* goes to press — or the digital equivalent thereof — it has just been announced by Bowls BC that interclub competition should soon be possible again, though details remain to be determined. However, it was also noted that while the liability insurance provided by Bowls BC covers interclub play by bowlers, it does not cover such activity by croquet players. That insurance will have to be provided through Croquet Canada, so will require croquet clubs that wish to play in interclub tournaments to join Croquet Canada for their insurance or purchase their own. Croquet Canada is currently in the process of obtaining a definitive statement regarding the coverage its policy provides, so members can understand clearly what is covered and what isn't. Watch this space!

This year, Victoria LBC has announced some tournaments for club members only:

June 24	— Intermediate Snake Doubles
July 1	— Canada Day Croquet and Bowling
July 10	— Advanced Snake Singles
July 29	— Snake Hi-Lo
August 12	— Novice Snake Doubles
August 26	— Advanced Snake Doubles
Sept 22 or 24	— End of Season Croquet and Bowling

There will also be Friday Evening Croquet at 5pm, starting June 25.

With luck, we'll have a more comprehensive listing of the region's tournament plans in the next issue. All clubs are urged to provide their schedules for publication here.

Handicapping for Golf and Snake

Two players meet for a nice game of croquet. One player has a lot of experience, the other is a relative novice. Player A trounces Player B, 7-1.

Was it a fun game? Was there anyone who had doubt about the outcome?

One of the prime purposes of handicapping is to allow all games to be played without the outcome being known in advance — to allow stronger and weaker players both to feel they have a chance to win, to enjoy the suspense and the added challenge.

So how does handicapping work?

First, the players have to be assigned a handicap, and that requires measuring their skills. Once a handicap is assigned, it can be used in a variety of ways. For example, if Player B has a handicap of 12 and Player A has a handicap of 5, Player B might be handed seven extra turns at the start of a game. These turns can be taken immediately after a regular turn, but must be taken using the same ball. So in a Snake game, Player B can send his striker ball across court, just missing the partner ball; then Player B can use one of the handicap turns to take a follow-up shot, hitting the partner ball and earning an extra shot for a hoop attempt.

Another way to use handicaps is to start the game with a pre-adjusted score. If play starts with Player B already having four points, can Player A score seven points for herself before Player B scores his final three points?

Another purpose for handicaps is to decide pairings in Hi-Lo competitions, where the player with the highest handicap is paired with the player with the lowest; the next pair would be the second-highest with the second-lowest; this process of assignment continues until the two players at the middle of the pack are paired. When players have assigned handicaps, these pairings are less subjective.

One more value of handicaps is that they make it easier for players to enter competitions in distant locations. If a tournament director is determining where to place players in a tournament ladder, knowing the handicaps of unfamiliar players allows those players to be placed in reasonable slots. For this to be useful, the handicapping system has to be fairly uniform across the universe of players, or at least across countries.

Handicaps are not permanent. Every time a game is played, the winner earns points and the loser loses points according to a set scale. Over time, an improving player wins more than he or she loses, and his or her

handicap is lowered as a result. If a player goes through a bad patch, the handicap rises for a while. The point is, the handicap reflects the player's likelihood of winning games relative to the opponent.

Handicaps aren't infallible guides to who will win or lose. Players have different strengths, and those strengths can have a different impact on a game with one opponent than they would on a game with another. But if you have a handicap of 6 and you meet a new competitor who has a handicap of 7, you know you'll be playing a fairly competitive game.

Right now, Croquet Canada is working on developing a handicapping system for Golf Croquet. This system, once put into place, will allow the handicapping of all members of Croquet Canada, and for the maintenance of their handicap records. This in turn will allow these members easier entry into local, regional, national, and international tournaments, and inclusion in the international ranking system.

Croquet Canada's member clubs will need to play a role in the system, by keeping track of games and their outcomes, and sending that information to Croquet Canada for input into a national database. Right now, that database doesn't exist. Croquet Canada is currently testing a handicap assignment system, and once that system is approved, all clubs will be urged to assess their members and send the information to Croquet Canada. The necessary database will be built and all this information entered into it, and the clubs will be informed about the process of keeping everything up to date. It will take a little effort and time, but we'll get there.

The system that Croquet Canada is testing is based on the system developed by the USCA, and it appears likely that we'll make it work.

Interestingly enough, a few tweaks will make the system work for Snake-in-the-Grass as well, but the differences between Golf and Snake make it quite possible that a player's handicap for one will not be exactly the same as his or her handicap for the other. As a result, any Snake handicaps will have to be maintained in a separate system that only takes into account the result of Snake games. The Snake Committee will have to administer such a system until such time as Snake is adopted worldwide as a broadly accepted variation of Golf.



Reptilian Suggestions

As a social game, Snake should be adaptable to play with three players as well as the traditional two or four. Vancouver's Russell Uhler provides the following suggestions, as used at the Dunbar club:

(1) Each player plays 1 ball so 3 balls are in the game. If players are roughly equal then an extra turn is earned by hitting the ball following the one you are playing. If one player is weaker then they can earn an extra turn by hitting either opponent's ball.

(2) Play the game using 4 balls with one weaker player. The 2 stronger players are a team and play usual Snake rules. The weaker player of course plays 2 balls and can earn an extra turn by hitting either its partner ball or the ball following the ball they are playing in that turn or if they are very weak then they can earn an extra turn from hitting any ball.

Another approach to Snake is intended to allow more satisfactory play between players at different skill levels — the player or team that is weaker plays Snake while the other team plays Golf. This denies the stronger team the extra shot from roqueting the partner ball.

These are all slight variations in the rules. When you think of other options, send them to Your Editor for inclusion in future issues.

A Note from the Editor

This issue is clearly an attempt to revive *6 Hoops* from a premature death. For this effort to be useful, I need input from everyone. I need notice of upcoming events at clubs across the Northwest, including Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. I need notice of events that might be of interest to players across the Northwest (this clearly includes the rest of Canada and California, in addition to the Northwest itself). I need reports on events that have happened, and who was involved. After all, we want to hear what all of our fellow croquet players are up to.

We also want ideas about croquet tactics, advice about where to go to see useful videos, information on sources of equipment, listings of opportunities for training, and whatever other croquet-related material might be of interest to Northwesterners.

And we want photos. Group photos of players don't really thrill us here, but shots of players in action are always welcome, especially if that's the player who took second place with an astounding win in the semifinals.

And please note that 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.

The more input I get from you, the better this publication will serve your interests.

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I'll be happy to add or delete names from the mailing list upon request.

