

What to practise to improve in GC?

Lionel Tibble offers insights into the pathway to achieving better results for players who are serious about improving their game.

Session 1. What does the player need to improve to succeed more often?

The three chief aspects which lead to success are:

- Skill
- Tactics
- Mental approach

What skills are letting me down? In order to improve, the player first has to understand the skill aspect(s) of their game where perhaps their natural ability is giving them an edge over opponents but, more importantly, where their skills are lacking.

Statistical analysis in elite amateur and professional sports is now commonplace and Golf Croquet has its own excellent statistical analysis tool called CPA or Cowing Performance Analysis. Briefly, CPA quantifies the number of times during a game when a particular player succeeds or fails in achieving a desired result. This allows any player - with the help of an assistant or coach - to determine which aspects of their game are most in need of attention and those which they are already reasonably proficient with. If you aren't already aware of this very useful tool then please read the excellent 2020 article from Jenny Clarke at <http://www.croquetworld.com/Game/quantifying-golf.asp>

For the results to be indicative, a player should aim to complete a number of CPA tests before drawing conclusions from the results. A single test may not be representative! And a player really cannot do this on their own – an assistant or coach is necessary. Summarise in a chart such as this:

Element	Total Shots Game A=B+C	Total Shot Success B	% Element Success 100x B/A	% of Game Success (B/game shots x100)	Total Shot Fail C	% of Game Fail (C/ game shots x100)	% Element Fail 100x C/A
Position							
Clear u 7 yds							
Clear o 7 yds							
Hoop							
Stun shot							
Jump shot							
Jaws							
Unjaws							
Block							
In-offs							
Other							
Totals							

The results of all skill aspects may clearly show where a player needs to prioritise efforts in raising skill level. For example, for one particular player 20.13% of all positioning strokes may be unsuccessful. This is therefore the area where improvement will improve their game

the most. Armed with this information the player can now devote some time to improving positioning skills by frequently and regularly undertaking a practice routine, which incorporates an inherent recorded scoring system aimed at demonstrating their actual improvement over time.

Session 2. I've identified that my positioning skills need improving. What can I do about it?

Having performed a number of CPA tests all indicating that your positioning skills are letting you down, you have identified a 20% scope for improvement. Improving skill sets is tackled by creating a set of practice regimes which must be repeatable, measurable and fun.

- *Repeatable* – In order to demonstrate that your particular practice regime is helping you, you must continue with the same regime and not introduce any variable elements to it.
- *Measurable* – You must be able to measure any improvement (or decline) in skill session by session, and record the results; otherwise, how do you know if what you are doing is having a positive or negative effect on your game?
- *Fun* – Practising can be made fun especially if you can do it with a friend to add an element of competitiveness to the occasion. A friend may also be helpful in spotting where you may be going wrong at any point and give you positive feedback.

Perhaps most important of all, you must set out with a clear intention to practise regularly and frequently and not just on the odd occasion. Then at the end of each session record your scores for each practice regime and compare to earlier scores. Unless you do this it will be difficult to appreciate that you are actually increasing your skill level and gaining more encouragement going forward.

A couple of positioning practice regimens are: Starting from corner 4 as per a normal game, play the balls in rotation as per normal with the aim to position optimally for a hoop 1 attempt rather than tactically. No clearing, no promoting, just positioning. From the position your balls achieve you should then attempt to run the hoop if possible. Record each successful hoop attempt, play the balls from where they lie towards the next hoop and so on. As your positioning improves so should your scores.

Alternatively, fix a bisque in the ground in a random position in the open court and choose any fixed position on the boundary (adjacent to a hoop, in a corner or on a penalty spot) from which to play towards the bisque. The object is to see who can get closest to the bisque. The winner chooses a different location for the bisque next time. You can do something similar aiming to see who can get closest to the peg from various starting points around the boundary. Or make up a regime of your own!

Session 3. I've identified that my clearing skills need improving. What can I do about it?

Clearing is another key skill to develop. A term often used in Croquet is Critical Distance (CD), which is the distance at which you can regularly achieve a more than 50% success rate. This can be applied to various scenarios such as straight hoop running where you consistently achieve 60% success or better at 3 yards, but only 40% at 4 yards. This means you have a CD of 3 yards and consequently should be able to confidently take on a 3-yard

hoop shot. Similarly, CD can be applied to clearing and the following practice regime will help you determine your CD and simultaneously improve your clearing success.

You will need for this a hollow plastic hockey practice ball available from Amazon, a metal ground peg and a length of elastic or string. Secure the peg in the ground, tie one end of the string or elastic to the metal peg and the other to the ball. This is your target and is similar in size to a croquet ball.

Begin by placing a ball marker 7 yards away and from that spot have 10 shots at the target. If your CD score is above 50%, move the marker 1 yard further away from the target and have 10 more shots. If on the other hand you score less than 50% move the ball marker 1 yard closer. At the end of your practice session pace out or measure the CD you have achieved and aim to better it at your next session.

In the first instance this regime will identify your current clearing CD so you should then be confident in clearing the majority of targets this distance away. As an adaptation you can forgo the 10 shots and only have one go at the target. If you miss, move the marker one yard nearer and if you succeed, move it one yard away. Soon you will find that the marker is hovering in roughly the same position. Take a measurement and at your next session try to better this.