

Tips from David McCoy, Professional Croquet Player:

Here are my tips on how to hit a ball straight:

First you have to aim! Stand six feet or more back from the ball and picture a straight line on the ground from the ball you are hitting to the target. Some like to aim at an even more distant point beyond the target on that line. Try both.

The reason most balls are not hit straight is that we either raise our head or our body or both, to see where the ball is going – almost guaranteed to miss! Freeze your body and move nothing but your arms and hands, following through with the mallet on that straight line you visualized, until a bit after the ball is struck. And here is my best “trick” to keep from looking up too soon: Do not look at the ball as you hit it.

Instead, look at...and try to hit...a point about four inches or so IN FRONT of the ball on the line to your target, and stay down until you see your mallet pass through that point, dead center. Do that and you are guaranteed not to have looked up too soon and to hit your target if you aimed properly!

The other two most common reasons balls are hit off-line is speeding up and pushing with the lower hand (mostly a Standard Grip issue) and tightening your grip as you start to swing through the ball.

Almost every mishit ball, even though lined up properly, is the result of speeding up and tightening the grip to power-hit the ball.

Three tricks to avoid that:

1. Keep your swing at an even pace, count evenly 1,2,1,2 as you cast, and keep that pace as you swing through the ball;
2. Take more backswing for greater distance; and
3. Avoid changing the tightness of your grip mid-swing by simply tightening your grip fully before you set your aim, especially if you are trying to kill the ball!

Practice these tricks with a friend by shooting four balls at the stake from the line at mid-court. Hit the ball at a speed that lets the ball reach your friend on the boundary opposite you if you miss the stake.

See how often you can hit the stake versus your friend. Ask your friend to tell you if you aimed wrong, looked up, or sped up your swing. Use your cell phones to video each other to see for yourself what you're doing. When you start hitting two out of four, thank your favorite croquet guru (me) for this free lesson...and then take lessons from a real Pro!

Don't practice your bad habits! When you hit the stake four out of four, sign up for the Pro Tour! Enjoy!