

Handicap Association Coaching - Lesson 2: The Modern Break

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Tradition dictates that there's a standard layout for a four-ball break: ball at your current hoop, ball at your next hoop, and a ball at the peg. I won't bore you with the details - make a hoop and send the object ball to the next-but-one hoop, each time pivoting around the middle ball to make things easier. This way - say the coaches with some glee - you can make an all-round break, and you need only ever play 12-yard take-offs and 25-yard half-rolls.

That's the theory. In practice, it's 9.40 on a Sunday morning. You're not warmed up, the caffeine's not kicked in, and you've not worked out the pace of the lawn, half of which is covered in dew, half not. You've set up a decent-looking break for a bisque, but you want some easy, little shots to get things tidier. The last thing you want is big, difficult heaves across the lawn. And that's the problem with the traditional break.

Actually, that's not the only problem with keeping a pivot ball at the peg. If you're given the choice (which you are), deliberately putting any ball within a foot of anything else is usually a really, really bad idea. Until the last ten seconds of the game, the peg serves no real purpose, except to get in your way. And the closer a ball is to the peg, the more awkward an obstacle it is. There's no stupider way of breaking down, or wasting a bisque, than landing a foot away from a ball, but not being able to hit it because there's a peg in the way.

So what's the alternative? With the traditional technique, you move the pivot ball just a few feet each time, and the striker's ball does all the work. Most top players work the other way round. The pivot ball moves around, and the striker's ball travels the short distances. Here's how it works.

You want to keep the pivot in front of you (i.e. vaguely between you and your next hoop) at all times. At the start, when you're heading towards Hoop 2, it wants to be somewhere in the grey triangle shown in Figure 1. As a general rule, try placing it between a third and half way towards the middle of the opposite boundary. Here, that means somewhere level with

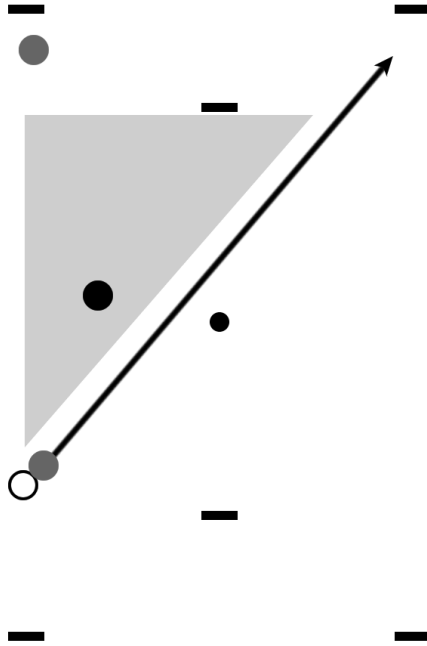


Figure 1: The pivot (black) can go anywhere in the grey triangle. The best spot is somewhere around the point shown.

the peg, and about four yards left of it, Figure 2. With your Hoop 2 ball a couple of feet in front of the hoop, you're ready to go. So:

1. Come through Hoop 1, and hit the object ball. You're probably a couple of yards north of the hoop, so you'll naturally have a clear line towards Hoop 3.
2. Play a straight drive, sending the ball to Hoop 3. You should drop very close alongside and, crucially, to the South East of the pivot. If not, practise it. It's a straight shot, and all you should be focusing on is a good position for your ball. We can tidy up a bad pioneer later.
3. Rush the pivot somewhere towards the Hoop 2 pioneer. I refuse to be any more precise about that. It depends on where your shot's pointing. Rushing to the boundary is too far for most tastes, as you'll have to roll the pivot back towards the middle. Rushing well short of the hoop is no disaster you've reduced a precarious 12-yard take-off to

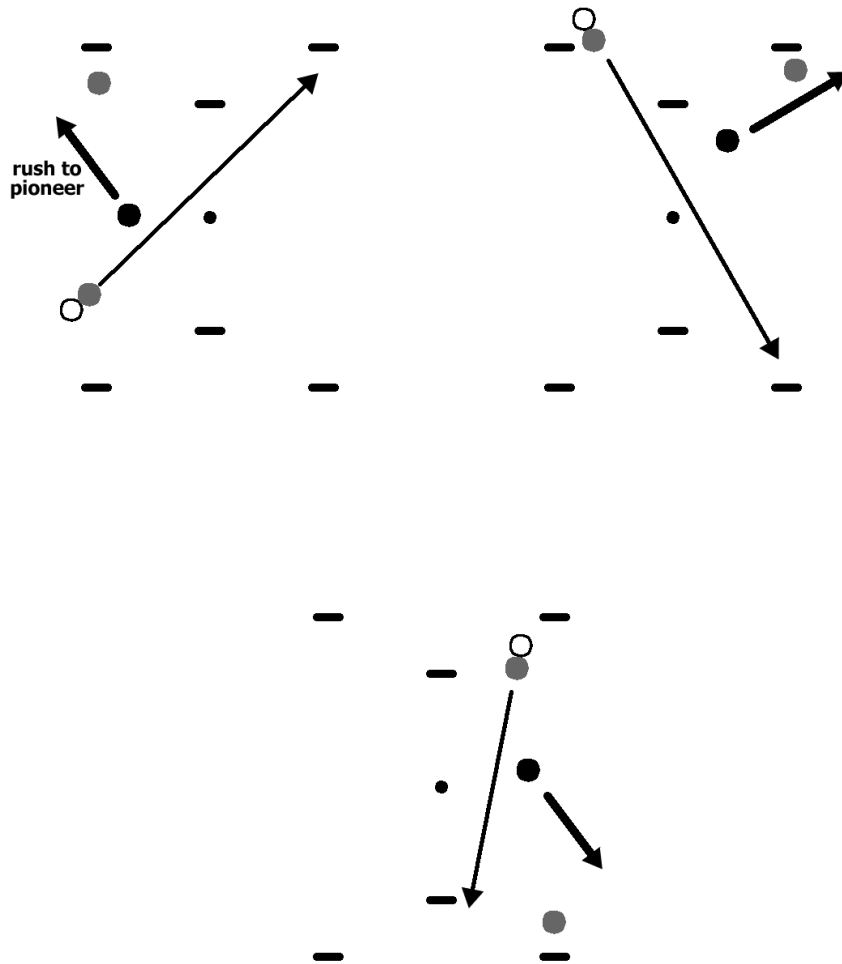


Figure 2: Pivot placements for Hoops 2 (top left), 3 (top right) and 4 (bottom). With the pivot at the optimum spot, you should land right alongside it ready for a rush towards your next hoop.

a comfy 4-yard one. In an ideal world, your rush will go just beyond your target, to the edge of the Inner Rectangle (where the line from Hoop 1 to 2 meets the one from Hoop 2 to 3). Let's assume that's the case.

4. A little stop shot sends the pivot ball back into play, and you land ideally placed for the Hoop 2 ball. As before, the pivot goes somewhere towards the middle of the opposite boundary (between Hoops 3 and 4). In this case, that'll leave you a ball a yard or two past Hoop 6.
5. Through the hoop, and you've another straight shot to send something down to Hoop 4.

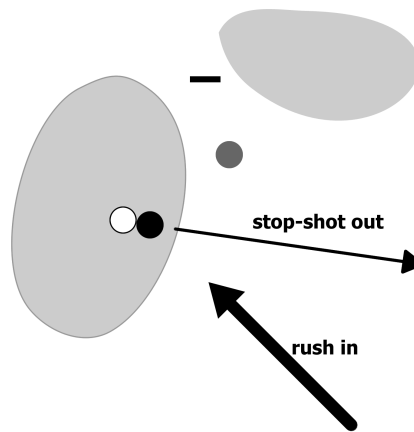


Figure 3: There's plenty of leeway about where to rush to, as long as you can send the pivot back to somewhere useful. Anywhere in the shaded areas is OK, but the balls are shown for the ideal spot. Wherever you go, your ball should land very close to the Hoop 2 ball after the next shot.

The same procedure follows. Each time you rush the pivot just beyond your pioneer, and stop it back into play. By keeping the pivot moving, you're reducing all the distances the striker's ball travels. You've also cut out all those ugly rolls and take-offs in favour of rushes and stop-shots. Needless to say, it takes a bit more confidence with rushing than many players have. But then again, the margin for error on each of those rushes is much, much wider than for the long take-off which you'd have to play otherwise (see Figure 3.)

All of this anticipates that you're playing an error-free game, and that everything is placed perfectly in position. The next couple of lessons deal with some little tricks to juggle the balls round and rescue you from impending disasters.