

# Handicap Association Coaching - Lesson 3: Mid-Break Tactics

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Why do people always break down at the same hoops? Up in this part of the world, there's a position we call 'The Southport Leave': you set up a laid break, then fail Hoop 2; then you try again with your partner ball, and repeat the exercise. When the clip position is 2 & 2 against 2 & 2 after an hour and a half, you know you're in for a long, terrible game.

There's something sort of inevitable about failures at Hoop 2. The break isn't stable yet, and you've no momentum. I've not dwelt on setting up breaks in these lessons, so refer you to other previous articles in the Gazette and elsewhere. My only advice is to practise using bisques to get all four balls into play fairly quickly, because the situation should improve almost immediately once you're on to the easier stretch of the break, and you've tidied your game up.

For the purposes of this lesson, we'll skip ahead, and assume that you've managed to place the pioneers for 3 and 4 well, and that you've had no trouble dealing with those hoops. As in the last lesson, I'm supposing that all our shots throughout are perfect, so we can see the principle of what ought to happen. Next time, I'll be detailing how to rescue a poor position after you've had a string of shots which don't work; but now we'll look at the central few hoops, and consider a few tricks for making your break play easier.

## 1 The Middle Stretch

Beyond Hoop 4 there's a run of hoops (5, 6 and 1-back) which provide the opportunity for some easy scoring, and allow you to grab the break and bring it under control. It's just as well, because 2-back is by far the hardest on the lawn.

Why is that? Look at the layout of the hoops: for every hoop on the lawn, you can stand by your current hoop and see each of the next two,

except for 2-back (Figure 1.) Once you come through 6, 1-back is eight yards just in front of you, but 2-back is 19 yards behind you over your left shoulder. The awkward sharp left turn after Hoop 6 forces you to send a ball in directly the opposite direction. Your pioneer's out of position, and you're about to hit a major problem.

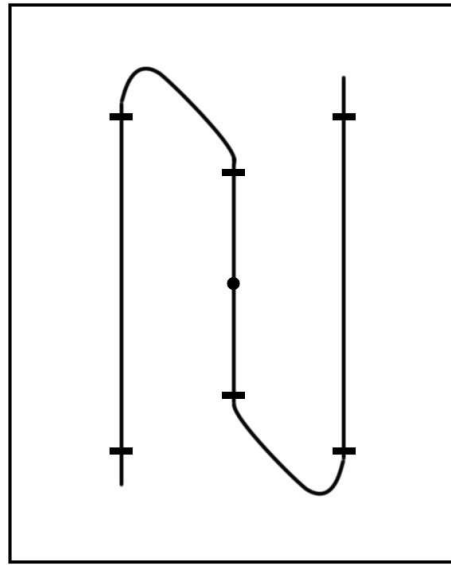


Figure 1: Follow this line with your finger. After every hoop you can see the next two in front of you. But after Hoop 6, 2-back disappears from sight. You're moving forwards, but sending a ball back behind you.

So here's the answer to my initial question back in Paragraph 1. People break down early on at Hoops 2, 3 and 4 because they've not yet got the turn under control, or because they're not yet warmed up and happy about their shots. But people break down at 2-back because it's so much harder to get a good pioneer. Here's my top tip to get you out of trouble.

## 2 The Early Pioneer

I talked in the last lesson about placing pioneers for the corner hoops. To cut a long story short, you want to keep the pivot about three or four yards from the peg, and on your side of the lawn. Going between hoops 4, 5 and 6, where the shots are shorter, there's less need to be so diligent. Rather



### 3 The Pivot Swap

What's happened here is something you'll find useful throughout the turn when things go wrong we've swapped pivot balls. Until Hoop 5, Black was the pivot. It then became the pioneer to 1-back, with Blue taking on the pivot role after Hoop 6. The next lesson will deal with how to use this principle to tidy up a lost position, so it's worth showing another example in action to reinforce the point.

We'll fast-forward a couple of minutes from the last case. You're still playing Red, and have just come through 1-back with Black. Yellow is waiting as a 2-back pioneer at the next hoop. Blue is the pivot. Most players would play a long shot to send Black to 3-back, with Red dropping on Blue, ready to make their way down towards Yellow (Figure 3.).

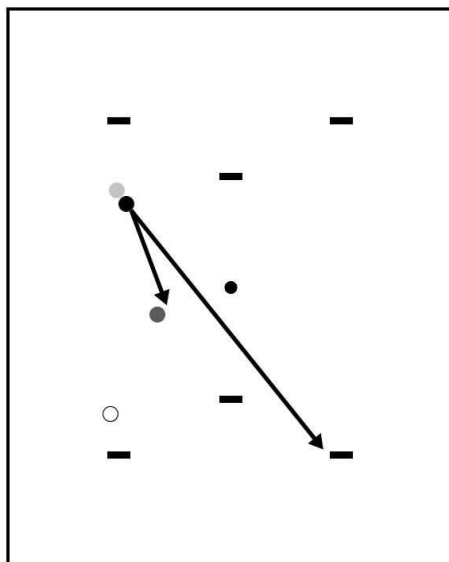


Figure 3: The standard course of action. You've got a ball ready at 2-back, and you want to get a ball to 3-back. Play a big straight drive: Black goes to 3-back, Red stops on Blue. Red rushes Blue to Yellow, and shoves it back into play as the pivot (sort of, maybe, vaguely somewhere near the peg).

That's fine, and I'd usually do the same. What I've started doing recently, though, is to switch back between Black and Blue. So, I leave Black in the middle, and make Blue my next pioneer. I rush Blue down towards 2-back, to somewhere I can send it across to 3-back (Figure 4.)

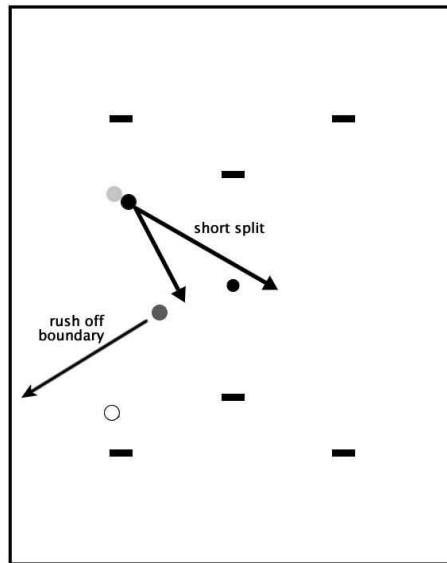


Figure 4: The same with a pivot swap. Place the pivot ball at the peg first: Black goes to the middle, Red stops on Blue. Red rushes Blue to Yellow, but this time sends Blue to 3-back. The outcome's the same, but the shot to place the pioneer is shorter, straighter and safer.

The moral of this lesson is this. Don't get too bogged down in which ball serves which function. I've seen many games where a player starts with Black as a pivot, and plays all 12 hoops like that. You'll have no precise instructions from me on this point, as it's important that you figure things out yourself as best meets the case. But it's also important that you open your mind to the possibilities of switching the balls round in mid-break. It's often, as we'll see in the next lesson, a life saver.