

Roque

Roque is croquet's hard-edged American cousin: same family tree, very different personality. It emerged in the late 19th century as Americans leaned toward precision, standardization, and courts that behaved the same in July as they did in October. Here's how it works.

The court

Roque is played on a **hard clay court**, rectangular and surrounded on all four sides by **low wooden sideboards**. The boards are not decoration—they are integral to play. Balls rebound off them much like a billiard cushion. There is no grass, no slope, no weather-induced variability. The court is engineered fairness.

Equipment

Mallets are shorter and heavier than croquet mallets. Balls are slightly smaller and harder. Hoops (called wickets in croquet) are heavier, set firmly into the clay, and do not move. Everything about roque favors accuracy over finesse.

Layout

Here's the standard **roque court specification** and **hoop layout** used in the classic American game. These are far more exact than the flexible lawns of croquet, because roque was designed to be *repeatable and geometric*—almost like billiards with mallets.

Court dimensions

A regulation roque court is:

60 feet long × 30 feet wide

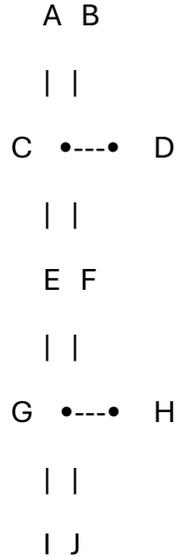
(always rectangular, with a hard, level clay or packed surface and low wooden **sideboards** around all four edges). The sideboards are typically **2–3 inches high**, enough to keep balls in play but low enough to make bank shots easy.

Unlike croquet lawns, every roque court is **identical**, so tournaments can be played anywhere without adjusting for terrain.

Hoop layout

Roque uses **10 hoops** (sometimes called “wickets” in croquet terminology) arranged in a symmetrical pattern down the length of the court. They are set so that when you view the court from above, the pattern looks like a stretched ladder down the center, with evenly spaced pairs of hoops.

A standard layout looks like this (labels are approximate positions, not physical markers):



Where:

- The ten hoops are placed in **five pairs** roughly at consistent intervals down the length.
- The centerline runs lengthwise down the middle; most players approach hoops from that axis.
- The pairs are mirrored left/right so that one hoop in a pair sits a few feet left of center, the other a few feet right.
- The finishing stake lies just beyond the final pair of hoops at one end of the court, with a **starting stake** at the opposite end.

A slightly more spatial description would be:

- Pair 1: 10 feet from the starting end, left and right of center line
- Pair 2: ~20 feet from starting end, left and right
- Pair 3: ~30 feet — center of court
- Pair 4: ~40 feet, left and right
- Pair 5: ~50 feet, left and right
- Finishing stake: ~2–3 feet past Pair 5 on the far end

Key differences from croquet

In six-wicket croquet, hoop placement is relatively flexible and based on grass dimensions. In roque, these hoop positions are **exactly measured** so every court plays the same. Combined with the sideboards, this makes roque a game of geometric precision where angles—especially bank shots—are central to strategy.

The objective

As in croquet, the goal is to send your ball through all hoops in a prescribed order and then strike the finishing stake. The player or side that completes the course first wins.

Turn structure

A turn begins with a single stroke. Additional strokes are earned, not given.

You earn extra strokes by:

- **Running a hoop** in the correct order
- **Hitting another ball** (a roquet)

Unlike croquet, there is **no free placement** after a roquet. Instead, roque uses a more restrained continuation of play.

After a roquet

When you strike another ball:

- You gain continuation strokes
- The balls remain where they lie
- No croquet shot (no picking up or placing balls)

This sharply limits break-building and makes multi-ball domination much harder than in six-wicket croquet.

Use of the sideboards

This is roque's defining feature.

Balls may be:

- Banked deliberately off the boards
- Rebounded to set up hoop approaches
- Used defensively to deny angles

Skilled roque players treat the boards as geometric tools, calculating angles with near-mathematical precision. This billiards-like aspect is what most distinguishes roque from any form of croquet.

Blocking and strategy

Roque is highly tactical:

- Blocking opponents' hoop access is common
- Defensive positioning matters as much as offense
- Long breaks are rare; positional play dominates

Luck is minimized. If something good happens, you probably earned it three shots earlier.

Scoring and play format

Roque may be played singles or doubles. Matches are typically shorter than croquet matches but more intense shot-for-shot. Because the court is standardized, skill transfers cleanly between venues—another reason Americans favored it at the time.

Why roque mattered

Roque appealed to American sensibilities at the turn of the 20th century:

- Standard courts
- Reduced luck
- Emphasis on precision and repeatability

It was popular enough to be contested at the **1904 Olympic Games**, the only time a croquet-related sport appeared on the Olympic program. Ironically, those same qualities—rigidity, intensity, lack of casual charm—also limited its long-term appeal.

Roque didn't fail because it wasn't good. It failed because it was *too exacting* for a culture that soon fell in love with tennis.