

Young croquet player taking on the veterans

Oliver Chapman is only 11 years old and is already playing in croquet tournaments with his father Paddy.

It's something of a family affair with Oliver, Paddy and his wife Miranda all involved in the Morrinsville Croquet Club.

Oliver only started playing the game about six months ago, but he paired with his father to participate in the Point Chevalier Handicap Doubles Tournament a couple of weeks ago.

There were two games a day, and each could last up to three hours, and Oliver won all his games. That it was his first tournament made the achievement all the more remarkable.

Oliver enjoys being part of Morrinsville club, where he practices on weekends and sometimes after school. "Everyone's nice at the club," he said, and Paddy agrees; he says he may be biased, but he thinks Morrinsville is the best club in the region.

There are essentially two styles of croquet – association and golf, and it is the former version of the game that Oliver enjoys. Association croquet can be thought of as the 'long version' of the game and is often seen as being the harder and more complicated of the two styles of play.

It is the more traditional form of the game and can be described as a race by players to be the first to complete a course by striking a ball with a mallet through a series of hoops in a specified order. In that respect it mimics pool

or billiards where players can make a 'break' earning extra strokes as they go along. It is possible to play a break of up to 91 strokes, where the player's ball passes through all 12 hoops and then hits the centre peg. With the concept of making breaks in mind, it may come as no surprise that Oliver also likes to play pool.

On the first day of the Point Chevalier tournament, Oliver was making breaks of just one, but on the second day things clicked into place and he started achieving breaks of seven, which meant getting the ball through seven hoops using a combination of shots. Stringing together seven hoops, meant making about 40 or 50 shots in that turn.

While association croquet is considered to be the more complicated version of the game, it is that complexity, and the number of different shots that can be played, that directly appeals to Oliver. "He (Oliver) is very determined," said Paddy, "and when he finds something he likes, he sticks to it."

The game can be played as singles or doubles, and there is a handicapping system that lets an inexperienced player get more turns against a stronger player.

Oliver currently attends Morrinsville Intermediate and when he's not playing or practicing croquet, enjoys art and music.

Paddy first played for the Morrinsville club about 20 years ago, before he had

even moved to Morrinsville. "It's a very welcoming club," he said.

Paddy likes the diversity that the game encourages. "It's the kind of sport where everyone can compete on the same terms and there are no distinctions made in the game between young or old, or men or women," he said.

It's a game that the family seems to excel at. Paddy is routinely ranked in the top ten association players in the world, has played for New Zealand since 2006 and was the open world champion in 2018. Miranda was the women's world champion in 2015.

Oliver said he definitely wants to keep playing and hopes he can

encourage more people to take up the association version of the game. Both he and Paddy would love everyone to come along and have a go at croquet.



LEFT: From left: Oliver and Paddy Chapman. ABOVE AND BELOW: Oliver and Paddy playing in the recent Point Chevalier Handicap Doubles Tournament.

