
Learning course and after bells with a ball

This game can be played quite easily to illustrate the idea of course and after bells – ringers who learn concepts well through physical experiences may appreciate this approach and could prefer it to a list of written numbers.

An ideal time to introduce this concept is as a preparatory step when beginning to learn Plain Hunt.

- Each participant stands in a circle, representing a bell.
- A ball is introduced, it represents a ‘dong’ of the bell (don’t worry too much about whether this is handstroke or backstroke).
- Ringers pass the ball around the circle representing rounds, 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6.
- Before the ball is passed around again, ringers swap in places 1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6.
- Pass the ball again – the ringers will now represent the second row of Plain Hunt, 2 - 1 - 4 - 3 - 6 - 5.
- At the end of this round, swap again – ringers in the lead and at the back will stay put, but those on the inside places will swap, so the order is 2 - 4 - 1 - 6 - 3 - 5.
- Pass the ball again.
- Repeat this process of swapping places and passing the ball around (draw everyone’s attention when it reaches back rounds).
- Continue until you are back in rounds, then repeat the game once more.
- Ask ringers whether they noticed a particular person (or bell) following them, or whether they noticed they were following anyone in particular.
- The act of physically passing the ball helps ringers to notice who they are interacting with each time.
- Discuss the concepts of course and after bells, then play the game again, asking ringers to look out for their course bell and after bell.

This game can be used when learning Plain Hunt, but there is no reason why it couldn’t be played when learning a method, so that ringers can experience and notice where their course and after bells are.

For more advanced ringers learning to conduct, it may also be a useful way of understanding the effect that calls have on the coursing order.