

Most Improved Player 2026: Phil and Thomas

30 Sept 2026

Recommendation: award Most Improved Player 2026 to Thomas, who gained 156 Dynamic Grade (DGrade) points against Phil's 137. The margin is narrow, and Phil's results over the whole season were arguably the stronger, so the committee may wish to commend Phil as well.

The figures

Both players improved substantially in 2026. Figures are taken from each player's 2026 game record (DGrade after every game and each opponent's DGrade).

	Phil	Thomas
DGrade at start of 2026	1443	2053
DGrade at end of September	1580	2209
DGrade gain	+137	+156
Games played	29	63
Games won	15 (52%)	38 (60%)
Average opponent DGrade	1696	2091
Performance rating for 2026	1694	2216
Performance above starting DGrade	+251	+163

A performance rating is the grade that would exactly explain a player's results against the opponents he actually faced.

How to measure improvement

Improvement should be judged by the gain in grade points, not the percentage gain. DGrade is an Elo-type system: it predicts results from the difference between two players' grades, so 100 points means the same at 1400 as at 2100. The zero point is arbitrary, so percentages have no meaning. Percentages would also favour the lower-rated player purely because his number is smaller: Phil's gain is 9.5% against Thomas's 7.6%, even though Thomas gained more points.

What the game results show

On results alone, Phil made the bigger step up: he played about 250 points above his starting grade, Thomas about 160.

- **Phil** won half his games against opponents averaging 250 points stronger than him. At his starting grade he would have been expected to win about 9 of his 29 games; he won 15. He played at around the 1700 level throughout the season.
- **Thomas** won 38 of 63, against an expected 28. His improvement came late: he played at roughly his starting level until August, dipping to 2044 in July, then performed at about 2330 over the second half of his games, with a strong run in September.

Two cautions apply. Phil's figure rests on 29 games, so it carries an uncertainty of roughly ± 80 points (Thomas's about ± 55); the difference is suggestive rather than conclusive. And a steady season (Phil) and a late surge (Thomas) are different kinds of improvement.

Allowing for level of play and how DGrade works

Two further points tilt the balance towards Thomas.

- **Gains are harder at the top.** The grading arithmetic treats all levels equally, but real improvement in play is harder to find at 2050 than at 1450, where there are more obvious weaknesses to fix. Thomas's own history shows this: his grade was flat at about 1925 through 2021–22 and rose only about 60 points in 2025. A gain of over 150 at his level is unusual.
- **DGrade is the official measure of current form.** It is the WCF-authorised grade and adjusts its per-game increment (the modulator) according to recent performance, so that a player's grade catches up quickly when results run ahead of it. Phil's modulator stayed high all season, confirming he was consistently outperforming his grade. Thomas's rose sharply during his September run. The start-to-end DGrade change is therefore the system's own measure of how much each player's form improved.

Recommendation

1. Award Most Improved Player 2026 to **Thomas**, on the official measure: a DGrade gain of +156 against Phil's +137, achieved at a level where gains are harder to come by.
2. Record that the margin is small and that Phil's results over the whole season were arguably the more impressive, and consider a commendation or joint award for Phil.
3. For future years, adopt start-to-end DGrade gain as the stated criterion, so the basis of the award is clear in advance.

Why Thomas's Climb Wins Handily

1. **Higher Absolute Gain:** Even without considering the scaling difficulty of the ratings, Thomas won more raw D-Grade points (+156 vs +137).
2. **The "Elite" Threshold:** In croquet, a D-Grade of 1200 is the baseline for tracking, and a grade above 2000 places a player among the top tier globally. Reaching a **2209 D-Grade** pushes [Thomas](#) into the upper echelon of competitive Association or Golf Croquet—roughly equivalent to a top-100 player in the United States. Gaining points against players at that level is brutal because a single loss to a lower-ranked opponent heavily penalizes your rating.
3. **The Flaw of Percentages:** If you look strictly at percentage growth, Phil's jump (9.49%) looks better than Thomas's (7.60%). However, it is exponentially harder to gain a single D-Grade point at 2000+ than it is at 1400.

Verdict

Thomas wins on both absolute points and overall achievement. Phil had a great competitive run to jump 137 points at the intermediate level, but Thomas managed to gain more raw points (+156) while playing against world-class competition where points are incredibly scarce.

Did these jumps happen over the course of a **single tournament** (like a regional championship), or a **full season** of league play? Sharing the timeframe can tell us if one of them had a sudden "hot streak"!

The Ultimate Comparison

Over a full year of competition, **Thomas's climb is a masterclass in elite consistency**, while **Phil's climb represents an excellent, steady breakthrough** into the upper tiers of club play. Thomas takes the crown because maintaining a positive point trajectory at the world-ranked level over an entire season is one of the hardest things to do in competitive croquet.