

Uneven Bars

Tkatchev Drill

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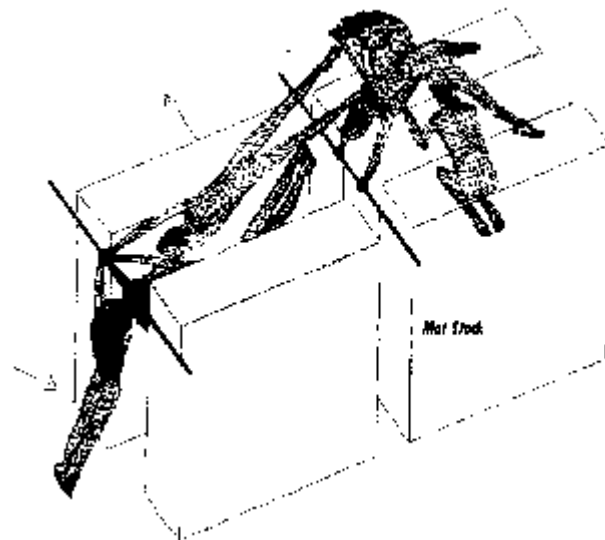
The Tkatchev has become a very prevalent skill among elite uneven bar routines. The skill has almost become a compulsory-optional element. The teaching of the

Tkatchev, although not extremely difficult, can be troublesome due to the blind nature of the release and the fear factors involved in going over the rail backwards..

While presenting a workshop to Wisconsin gymnastics coaches, by an invitation from Jeff Wilborn from Janesville, Wisconsin, I was told about a drill for teaching the Tkatchev was very intriguing. Sadly, I cannot recall who told me about this drill and thereby offer them credit for the idea-be assured however that the idea was not mine.

The Drill

The basic drill is shown in Figure 1. The gymnast swings downward and upward in a giant swing that has presumably been shaped to lead to the proper tap and rise for a Tkatchev. As the gymnast rises and passes the height of the rail she begins the "reversal" of the Tkatchev, straddles her legs, and with the assistance of spotters, lands in a straddle bridge position on two mat stacks. I was told that this is followed by having the gymnast perform the same drill more energetically to arrive in the bridge position with less and less assistance. The gymnast then



attempts to perform the reversal more energetically until she can land in a straddle stand on the mat stacks, again with the assistance of one or two spotters. Finally, I was told that the spotters then simply help the gymnast through the release and rearward flight over the rail to a pit landing on the descent side. The coach(es) reported that the learning proceeded easily and that the gymnasts appeared to "catch on" to the motion more directly with this drill than with using an overhead belt and other approaches.

Cautions

Although I find the idea very intriguing I can see some potential difficulties with the drill and offer the idea for coaches to consider only as a possible adjunct to current teaching approaches. The first problem is the need for a large mat stack. It may be difficult for gyms to dedicate the total number of mats required for building the mat stack high enough to

reach the level of a rail that the fully extended gymnast can swing. The second problem that I see is that stabilizing the mat stack will be very important. If the gymnast lands on her feet and tips the mats the results could be disastrous. This could be partly alleviated by the simple weight of two spotters, but coaches should be cautioned to set-up a very stable mat stack. The third problem concerns the technical emphasis of the drill. Mr. Leonard Isaacs (American Academy of Gymnastics) told me that the men do their Tkatchevs with very little to no arch. Because women's technique often follows men, the arch that appears to be emphasized by this drill may be counterproductive in the long run. The up-side of this is that the drill would appear to emphasize the "internal rotation" (i.e., reversal motions) that appear very hard for gymnasts to learn.

The learning difficulties presented by gymnasts in the reversal phase of the Tkatchev was emphasized to me by Mr. Scott Crouse (Lone Star Gymnastics). This drill may assist in teaching the gymnast to perform this reversal, and actually releasing the bar to perform the complete skill in this setting may be unnecessary. The last problem concerns the technical issue of whether the gymnast should "shift-grip" during the reversal process and the landing on the mat stack while in a bridge position. When the gymnast performs the reversal and tries to land on the mat stacks in the straddle bridge position, the gymnast will probably be forced to shift grip to place her wrists on top of the bar if she wants to support herself in the bridge position. Although I have seen some gymnasts completely shift their grip leading to the release for the Tkatchev, these have been rare and it appears that this approach seriously limits the height that can be achieved in the flight of the Tkatchev. The grip-shift may impede a complete and forceful "throw" of the bar leading to the release and flight phases. This problem might be alleviated by simply spotting effectively, but my feeling is that you should not encourage the gymnast to shift her grip to support herself in the bridge position, and this will necessitate the support of the gymnast's body by an effective spotter.

However, I can also appreciate that when the gymnast must finally perform the skill completely and forcefully, the grip-shift issue may be eliminated by the speed of the movement and thus take-care-of-itself.

Conclusion

Again, I would like to offer this drill as an intriguing idea for very advanced gymnasts with special needs. There are some cautions that coaches and athletes should consider before using the drill. Two spotters should be provided to prevent the gymnast from falling between the mats and to assist the gymnast through the appropriate "reversal" position and landing on the mat stack. The mat stack and the physical set-up should be carefully planned so that the mats cannot tip and neither the coaches nor the gymnast can fall due to equipment movement. Finally, care should be exercised in evaluation of the drill's effectiveness with the regard to emphasizing the arch of the reversal and the problem of potentially emphasizing a grip-shift that could be counterproductive to the long term development of the Tkatchev.

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For those of you who speak Spanish or who are Spanish language students, this article has been translated for [Técnica](#).