

# Still Rings Handstand Development

*By Kelly Crumley*

The handstand on rings is a bit more complicated than a handstand on floor or parallel bars simply because the rings move and the other pieces of equipment do not!

There are literally hundreds of drills and exercises that can be done to develop the handstand. The handstand is a never-ending area of refinement. The better the handstand is, the better the gymnast will be. There are two main objectives in which to focus when developing the handstand: Strength and Balance. Both of these are addressed below.

## The Handstand Position

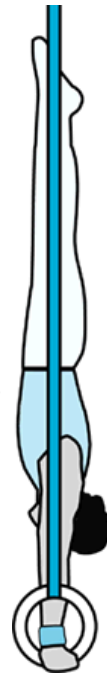
The handstand must first be developed on floor and then later applied to rings. The desired position as it applies to floor is as follows:

The hands should be placed on the floor shoulder width apart with the middle finger perpendicular with an imaginary line drawn between them. The fingers should be spread in order to help produce a wide base of support. Weight should be dispersed to the finger tips. The body should not be entirely supported on the palms of the hand. Balance is controlled at the finger tips. The elbows are locked and turned so that the inside of the elbow faces straight forward. The head is positioned neutral with ears between the arms. There should be equal parts of the head on both sides of the arm so that the line of the arms, bisect the head equally when viewing from the side. The eyes are focused on the floor between the hands. The back is straight and chest is slightly convexed, as if a string were connecting the shoulders together. The back is straight and the seat is tight with the hips turned under so that the lower back is straight. The legs, beginning at the hips, are in turn out with the heels and toes touching.

This can best be developed with the use of a wall. A wall will help to, not only balance the gymnast as corrections are made, but also help to align the gymnasts in a straight and vertical position. The gymnast should place his stomach against the wall. His hands should be placed on the floor so that the wrists are 2-3 inches away from the wall. (The 2-3 inches is an estimation depending on the size of the gymnast's chest.) The alignment should be completely vertical with no segmented body parts. The gymnast is working to extend up the wall without leaning against it. This position is very demanding and will take a lot of time to refine. The duration of holding this position against the wall will vary depending on the ability of the gymnast. It is important to hold the most correct position for as long as possible without poor technique. Once the body position declines, the gymnast should rest and begin a second attempt. Increments of 5 seconds up to 30 seconds, is a good progression of development when using this drill.

## Working In and Out of the Handstand Position

The handstand can be further developed by teaching the control of balance. While in the handstand away from the wall, the gymnast should learn to control the balance position from the shoulders to varying degrees in an arch to a hollow and vise-versa. This can be



done on the floor, parallel bars, floor horizontal bar or parallettes. Parallettes can be angled slightly out to stimulate the correct position of the rings.

Taping a set of rings to the end of a low set of parallel bars will help to maintain the rings in a turned out position while corrections can be made with regard to body position. Extra sets of rings are not always available, however, if you have them, this is a very good drill to refine the body alignment.

## **Developing the Handstand on Rings**

In addition to some of the drills already mentioned, strength development unique to rings will also be required. The movement of the rings, already discussed, makes holding a handstand on rings a bit more difficult than on some of the other events.

Holding a proper handstand must first be developed by stabilizing the gymnasts' ability to simply hold a support with the rings turned out. Again, increments of 5 seconds up to 30 seconds is a good progression of development when using this drill.

This drill is also used with the introduction of the L position, tuck planche, and back to a straight body support. This activity is introducing fundamental strength development that will later be used to learn a press handstand.

In the early stages of learning a handstand on the rings there is a period of "grunt" work by both the coach and gymnast. The gymnast orientates himself by bending the arms and climbing up the straps with his legs. The form is not a concern from the support to the inverted handstand position. However, once inverted, the proper body alignment must be worked and developed. The gymnast should place his legs so that the cable passes along his shins and only his ankles are lightly used to secure balance. He should not warp the cables around his legs. Once in this position, the coach should assist, in the beginning, with the turning of the rings to parallel or slightly more open than parallel. However, this should not exceed 45 degrees beyond parallel. Once stability is adequate, the coach may begin to help the gymnast balance the handstand position off the straps. This drill is important to develop. It gives the gymnast confidence that a handstand is possible with effort. Assistance from the coach for balance will help the gymnast to experience the correct turned out position for a longer period of time than he could experience on his own. This assistance will accelerate the learning of the handstand and correct body alignment.

The next step is to introduce pressing to a handstand from the L position. This is, again, done with assistance by the coach. The coach assists by holding the rings stable in a turned out position while in an L. From the L position the gymnast presses to the handstand with the rings turned out and arms locked. The coach assists in two ways-he is reducing the movement of the rings while at the same time keeping the rings turned out. Once the gymnast gets to the handstand position the coach can continue to assist by balancing the gymnast. This is an acquired spotting ability and takes a few attempts to master. Helping the gymnast balance the handstand is much the same as balancing a stick in your hand.

A strap can also be placed across the ring cables so that the legs may be used to rest against it in the handstand. The following are a set of drills and sequences that can be used to further develop the concepts mentioned above.

## Sequences and Drills

1. Lock arm support hold (rings turned out)
2. Lock arm support hold (rings turned out), L hold (rings turned out), lock arm press to handstand (rings turned out)-Gymnast uses legs on straps to balance.
3. Lock arm support hold (rings turned out), L hold (rings turned out), lock arm press handstand (rings turned out)-Gymnast uses straps for balance.

*Once the above drills are manageable, introducing the following skills to the sequence will enhance the gymnast's ability to gain further control of the handstand on rings.*

4. From the handstand, straight arm lower (rings turned out) to straddle L hold.