

Beginning Uneven Bars

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One of the most frustrating parts about coaching uneven bars is dealing with students who lack the strength to adequately perform what is demanded by the event, regardless of skill level. A shortcoming of most inexperienced coaches is that they become impatient in the development of the necessary strength. The end product is usually poor technique, lack of success and, in turn, frustration on the part of the athlete and the coach.

A key to getting quality long term results is the ability of the coach to combine fun learning with disciplined physical preparation (possibly without the student even realizing that they are being physically prepared). It is futile to emphasize one end of the spectrum or the other. In other words, the coach that drives uneven bar conditioning "down the throats" of the athletes daily will certainly end up with unhappy, unmotivated gymnasts and most likely a very high attrition rate. Similarly, the coach who endlessly "plays" on bars will end up with unsuccessful, weak athletes who will undoubtedly struggle to be productive. The key is finding a combination that fits your program.

Another key to successful bars is "time management" i.e. getting the most out of your athletes in the allotted time. Since every gymnast is mysteriously drawn to the addictive chalking ritual, I suggest developing "IDLE TIME STATIONS" that limits their opportunities to meet at the chalk box. Coaches may also want to practice the following secret phrases used by the worlds top uneven bar technicians: a) "Get out of the chalk!" b) "Get on a bar" and c) "Get out of the chalk!!" I have found this to be my secret to successful uneven bar coaching

Idle Time Stations

GLIDING:

- **Prone Leg Lifts** - Lying flat on your back, hanging onto a stationary object (base of the bars) lift your legs until they touch your hands.



- **Incline Leg Lifts** - Lying on a "cheese mat" inclined downward, hanging onto a stationary object, lift your legs to your hands.



- **Hanging Leg Lifts** - Either hanging from the uneven bars which allows a bit of swing or from a wall bar which eliminates the swinging and therefore makes the exercise more difficult.
- **Barrel Glides** - Hang onto the low bar, place your feet on a barrel. Extend your body as if you were gliding using the barrel for support.
- **Tube or Rope Glides** - Hang onto the bar, place your feet in a tube (surgical tubing, bicycle inner tube etc.) or rope. Practice gliding forward and backward.



- **Elevated Straight Body Holds** - Lying on your back, place your feet up onto an elevated surface (spotting block), hold an extended body position for 30 seconds. Add time and weight (weight belt or weight plate on the stomach) to increase difficulty.
- **V-Holds** - Hanging on the bar hold your feet to the bar for 30 seconds. Add time and/or weight (ankle weights) to increase difficulty.

KIPPING:

Stomach - See gliding drills

Arms -

- **Prone Straight Arm Pulls** - Lying on your back with appropriate bar bell weight held over head, pull the weight to your thighs. Sets of 8-12.



- **Inclined Straight Arm Pulls** - Lying on a "cheese mat" with your feet up at the high end and weight in hand. Pull the weight to your thighs. Sets of 8-12.
- **Inverted Straight Arm Pulls** - Hanging from your knees on the bar (use a spotter to hold the legs), with weight in hand, pull the weight to the bar. Sets of 8-12. You can also do straight arm pulls with tubing.
- **Wheel Pulls** - Using a "wheel on a stick" get on your hands and knees, round your back, squeeze knees and butt, and place the hips in front of the knees. Extend the wheel forward

while maintaining the desired hollow body shape. Pull the wheel back to the starting position using straight arms. Do not let the hips move from the initial starting position.



- **Push Up Position Wheels** - These are very difficult. Get into a hollow body push up position while holding onto the wheel. With the assistance of a spotter (spotter stands straddling the gymnast and grabs the waist) extend the wheel forward as far as possible.



- **Kip Machine** - Hang on the bar placing the feet in a tube or rope that is tied or hooked to the bar. Execute sets of straight arm kips standing up in the rope/tube to assist with the action. This drill can also be done while sitting on the rope/tube to increase the difficulty and more closely resemble the kip.



CASTING:

There are many phases in the development of a proper cast. Physical preparation is key to success but all too often this is just limited to the arms. Arm strength is of little use if the athletes can not maintain and control her mid body. Fear is also an important aspect to consider in the ability to cast as some beginner gymnasts are simply afraid to lean forward over the bar or afraid to fall.

Core Body Conditioning -

- **Arch or Hollow Rocking** - Lying on your back in a hollow body shape or on your belly in a tight arch position, rock for 30 seconds. Increase time and or arm position to increase difficulty. Start with arms by the sides, then arms across the chest, then arms crossed behind the head and finally, arms straight over head.
- **Arch or Hollow Holds** - Same as above except hold the position still. To increase difficulty add

weight held across the chest and or ankle weights.

- **Horizontal Tube Extensions** - Using a floor bar for your hands, place your feet in tubing tied to the spreader of the uneven bars. Obtain a push up position and extend the body forward, stressing the body shape and the forward leaning action.



- **Horizontal Tube Holds** - Same as above except hold the position with the shoulders well in front of the hands.



- **Side Sit Ups/Holds/Rocks** - As it is important to condition the sides as well as the front and back of the body.
- **Sit Ups/Up Hill Sit Ups** - Hanging from a bar execute sets of 15-25 up hill sit ups. To increase difficulty change the position of the arms from a) by your sides b) across the chest c) behind the head d) behind the head with weight.

Arm Conditioning -

- **Straight Arm Pulls with Weight** - Stand with your back flat against the wall, bend your knees to insure the lower back stays pressed to the wall, pull an appropriate amount of weight straight over head using straight arms.



- **Straight Arm Tube Pulls** - Lying flat on your back, pull tied off tubing from your thighs to an overhead position. Maintain a tight hollow shape throughout the pulling action.
- **Press Handstands** - Various types including straddle, pike, from a stand, from the floor, against the wall etc. This drill represents the casting action of the arms and serves well to condition this movement.
- **Push Ups** - Ranging from regular to handstand push ups and all angles in between.
- **Tucked Planche Holds** - On a set of paralettes or men's P-bars, tuck the knees to the chest, lean the shoulders forward over the hands, and lift the hips to a position slightly higher than horizontal. Hold this position for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add a weight belt to increase difficulty. This drill strengthens the shoulders and the ability to lean forward while casting.



- **Planche Presses** - With the assistance of a spotter, the body is lifted from a hollow body push up position to a handstand in an attempt to closely simulate the cast handstand. The gymnast maintains a tight hollow shape while "planching" the shoulders forward as the spotter assists them through the press. This is an excellent conditioning drill but is very "coach intensive."

