

Hey, That's A Pretty Good Drill

Creative Thinking To Help Coach Beginners

by John Wojtczuk, North Stars Gymnastic Academy, NJ

Probably the one thing that coaches most enjoy talking about is some of the great drills they've either seen other people do or that they've come up with themselves. The interesting thing here is that very often the drills aren't "new" but have actually been around for a while. This is especially true for younger coaches that have not had the benefit of being around as the sport has grown and evolved over the years. Many drills have been, well, not lost but rather more like misplaced over the years. This may have occurred for a variety of reasons-better progressions, changes in the equipment or the requirements of the event, or even in the rules or levels themselves. But even some of the "old stuff" can still be useful. This is especially true if they can be set up as individual stations, without the need of a spotter.

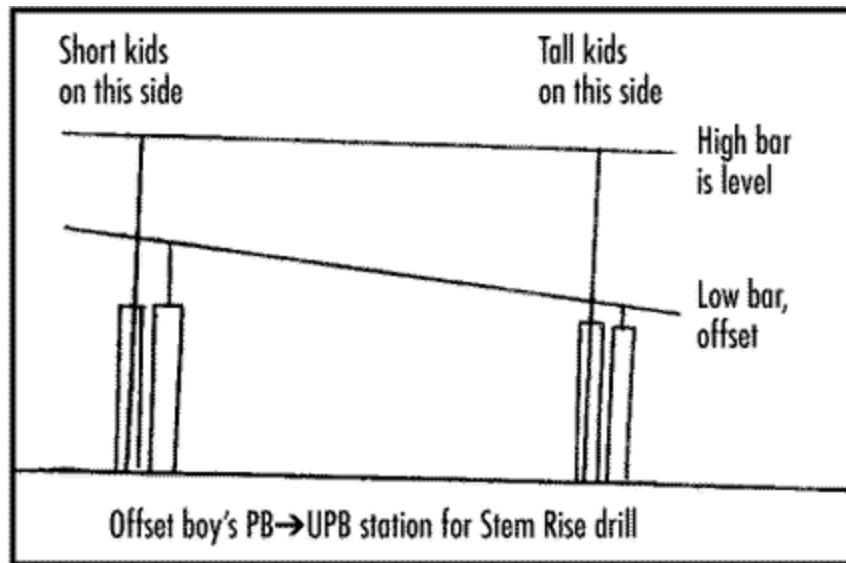


The Good Ol' Stem Rise ...

Let's start with some "kip" drills. For most of us, we rarely set the bars in very close any more. This has let a group of skill/drills called stem rises fall by the wayside. Both the double leg and single leg stem rise are very useful in teaching how to kip properly. You don't necessarily need these to teach a good kip, but for some students struggling to learn it, they can be valuable tools to aid them.

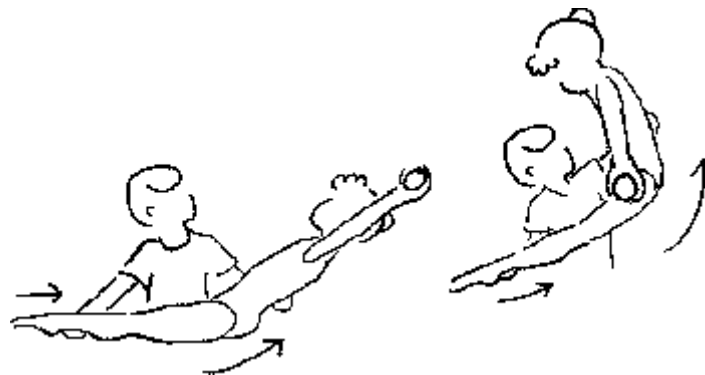
The hard part about using these drills is that you have to move the bars in really close to be able to do it. Often this is impractical and time consuming, particularly if you have gymnasts of very different heights. You have to keep moving the bars so they can do it properly.

Now, here's a "gimmick"-if you have a set of men's parallel bars, you can use them as a set of "mini-unevens" to do the stem rise as an extra station. (Hey, after all that's where uneven bars originated.) They can do both double and single leg stem rises here. Another time-saving, simplifying trick is to leave the "top" rail level and tilt the "low" rail such that one end is higher, and therefore closer to the high bar. (You can also rotate the bars in closer by swiveling the heads of the uprights.) The really short kids can go to the "narrow" end, the tall kids to the wider one and everyone else finds their own spot in between.



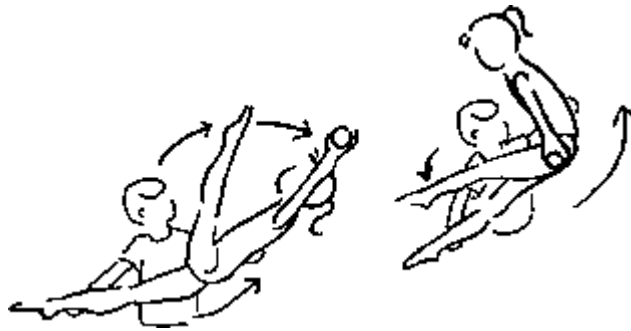
Spotted and Strap Swing-ups

An “updated” variation of the stem rise is the double leg swing up, where the coach holds both legs and helps the gymnast swing up to a support, simulating the kipping action of the arms. Safety note: since kids have been known to do silly things, make sure with any of these drills you have at least an 8-inch skill cushion underneath them in case a hand or foot slips.



Double Leg Swing Up (Spotted)

Now that drill's an “oldie,” but you can do the same drill as a single leg stem drill. Just let them keep one leg close to the bar and slide it up as you help them “kip” to support, just like a single leg stem rise. This helps the gymnast learn to coordinate the correct action of the arms with the correct action of the legs. (Hint: Alternate legs to avoid developing a “strong” side, or use the “weak side” leg to correct that particular problem.)



Single Leg Swing Up (Spotted): Alternate sides so as not to develop a favorite side, or use to correct the weak side.

The most used and common variation on these drills is the “strap swing up.” A weak or beginner “kipper” will be able to at least partially support her body weight by standing on the strap at the end of the drill. This is a great station for beginners since they can work it alone. Guess what? You can do a single leg swing up as well.

Start in support and “underswing” down lifting one leg along the bar while supporting her weight on the strap, just like a “rocking” kip. Then slide the leg up the bar on the way back up to support.



From front support swing down two legs, lift one leg to bar.



Slide one leg up bar as strap swings you back up.



Wrists shift forward as legs come together.

For the more advanced beginner, hanging a strap from the high bar with the bars moved in close will make it more difficult to do, requiring more arm strength and better timing since she cannot support her body weight by standing on the strap at the end. Again you can use the single leg swing up to help learn proper coordination of the arms and legs for the kip.



One leg up to simulate a kip action; hips swing in to LB then rock back.



Leg starts to "slide" up bar as hips swing back.



Legs come together on LB (or off) wrists shift forward as gymnast starts to lean.



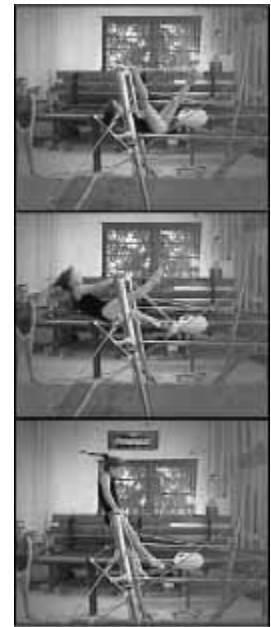
Finished position shoulders forward over toes.

Common errors: Pulling (bent arm) on bar; not jumping the hips "around" and up-just back

Possible Progression...

If I were going to put these together in an ordered sequence, I would start with the double leg swing up, both feet standing on the strap. This is the easiest for a beginner to do since she can support herself by standing on the strap.

Once she has this down well, I'd do the spotted double leg swing up-the one holding her ankles. This will make her use her arms a bit more to get up and eliminate some of the support she got from standing on the strap. Again, once she's doing it fairly well, I'd go to the double leg "hanging" strap. This affords her no chance to stand, forces her to use just her arms to get up, and makes her finish in a rounded pike at the end, just what we'd like to see in a good kip. Now I'd do the spotted single leg swing up, alternating sides to get her to start coordinating the leg action a bit. Then I'd finish with the same single leg drill in the strap, done a little like a rock kip. Of course the whole time you're doing the strength and flexibility with the kids-leg lifts, kip slides, and the like. So, we have quite a number of drill stations to use in teaching and developing kips.



As with anything, not much here is really new, but perhaps these ideas will give you all some useful ideas in training your gymnasts, or gets you thinking on some even better ones to use and share.

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Acknowledgements: Many of the ideas expressed here are not new. They have come from many coaches and sources experienced through the years-from my start as a high school gymnast through my years as a coach attending countless clinics and "shop talk" sessions. This attempt to consolidate these concepts into an organized presentation is to help the beginner level coaches, as so many other coaches have helped me. - J.W.

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