

A Progression for Teaching the Stalder Handstand

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The Stalder circle may well become an important element in the new Code. With the proposed devaluation of the back giant "blind change" to a "B", many of the old combinations for connection bonus have just been eliminated. The Stalder to HS is to maintain "C" value and a ½ in HS will allow it to be used for connection bonus. A Stalder 1/1 turn in HS is proposed to maintain its "D" value. So this skill may be increasing in popularity over the next year. This article presents one possible progression for teaching the Stalder to HS, and is based on the progressions I use to teach this skill.

The "model" I used to study this skill and pattern these progressions after is still what I consider to be the best performance, even after 18 years. If anyone still has a film (yes, film) of Marcia Frederick's gold medal bar routine at Strasbourg, France, in '78, that's the one I'm talking about. She performs both a Stalder HS and back toe circle to HS in the same sequence, as well as a Stalder blind change full (not reverse pirouette—she finishes the first ½ turn as a blind change turning on the way up into the HS—beautiful.) For most gymnasts, the traditional opening of hips and arms together is the most feasible and what I have geared these drills toward. The early "legs together shoot" has the advantage of allowing that true "blind change" action to occur, but is extremely difficult to do and may be considered an advanced style of the skill, not something for the first steps in learning it.

The key here is the technique of the entry into the skill, what has been called a "late drop." There was also a study by Gord Osbourne (University of Alberta) in Canada that compared the two techniques on entering into the Stalder for men's horizontal bar, and indicates that biomechanically the late drop was a better technique. It was watching the Stalder HS/toe HS sequence that was key for me. The absolute similarity of the drop for the two skills gave me the ideas for these progressions, and a key to performing the skill well. The advantage of the "late drop" is that it forces the maximum extension away (for swing) from the bar with the best control. It parallels the drop from a HS for a clearhip circle or glide kip, so there is some "carry-over" from those skills.

On page 17 is a chart to show a possible progression for teaching the Stalder.



The First Line of Drills

Now let's take the top line of the chart. The first step from left to right are the flexibility requirements for this skill, an excellent pike and straddle compression. The lower back may be susceptible to strains if not stretched well. There will be a good amount of force stretching the lower back at the "bottom" of the circle, so excellent lower back flexibility is as important as leg and hip flexibility to "get into" the proper straddle position to perform the skill.

The second element over is a specific "strength" drill for the last phase of the skill—the HS. Using a floor bar, first straddle press HS with the feet behind the bar. Later on, the feet will be placed slightly "in front" of the bar with the hands having to reach slightly between the legs and under the body to press to the HS, partially simulating one of the opening techniques for the Stalder.

Steps "3" and "4" across are two simple drills that don't need too much explaining. I feel it would be good to teach both the sole circle "arounds" as well as a good pike seat circle to teach holding compression as the gymnast goes around as well as circling the hands to the top of the bar without the support of the feet as occurs in the sole circle.

Stalder Handstand

This sequence is from my "demo" tape from the '94 Congress lecture. It is used here as an example of the drill jumping off a block to simulate the drop and "bottom" of the Stalder.



Pic. 1—Starting position always has the hands on the bar.

The last drill in this line is performed off raised blocks or mats and is very similar to a "rocking" drill used to teach the "drop" for clearhips. The blocks are set back from a lowered rail about two feet and are about 18" high. The gymnast starts with hands on the bar, shoulders about a foot above the level of the bar, and the body in a "straight-round" position, with the shoulders extended into a round back and the hips flat but with a tight flat stomach and squeezed "glutes" (Bill Sands described it as a "rainbow" position). The gymnast jumps from the blocks maintaining the round position in the shoulders and performs a piked sole circle dismount. Emphasis is placed on jumping straight first, and then piking onto the bar late.

This phase of the drill is critical for the gymnast who may just try to pike onto the bar "off the block." What this drill is designed to do is teach the proper body position for the drop phase, but by reducing the amount of force/swing generated from a cast. The standing start position simulates the cast, while the jump to a straight position and then to the sole circle is the actual movement pattern the gymnast would like to perform for the late drop. I strongly suggest teaching the pike to further reinforce the extension through the shoulders and the positions of the hips in relation to the bar for the drop. Again, it simulates the correct position for the drop accurately.

The Second Line of Drills

Here, the first drill is similar to what we've just discussed but the gymnast can do it jumping from floor or blocks and performing either piked or straddled. (Some of us may remember learning how to swing for "baskets" and kips on parallel bars—this is the same drill done on the uneven bars.) Emphasis is on teaching the gymnast some control of body position without a great deal of swing, as well as "feeling the bottom" of the swing. There is a slight opening of the compression at the top of both sides of the swing and a marked compression directly under the bar. The result is they are learning a little about "pumping" the swing here, too. Also, it is a phase in preparing the lower back to handle the stretch of the swing by gradually building up the force of the swing and further improving flexibility and range of movement.

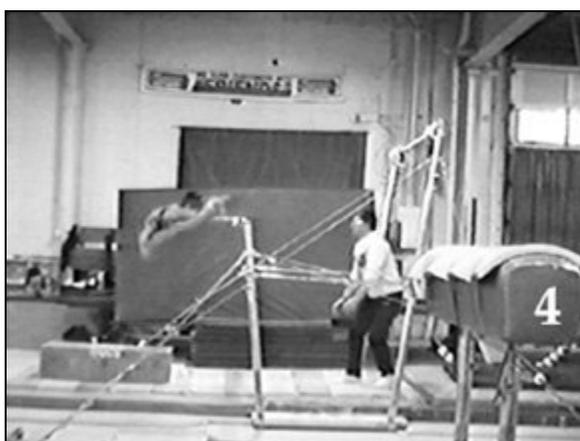
The second "strength" drill is the same as the first, except they aren't jumping any more. The third is the



Pic. 2—Feet are off and just starting to come up into position; shoulders and the lower back could be a little more rounded here.



Pic. 3 —Back is rounded; shoulders are at full extension prior to "roll in" to the bottom position. Note the legs are very close together (piked) before starting to straddle in. This shows the full extension we would like to see in the drop, partly due to the piked drills done earlier.



Pic. 4 —Legs are now into a very narrow straddle, legs very close to the arms in the "entry"; a common mistake here is a wide straddle-in - the narrow straddle allows you to "roll-in" to the

same as its counterpart in the first line, except what I call a "disengage" at the top of the bar—they now must rotate their hands to the top faster to allow the feet to slightly press off the bar at this point and then come right back on for the next circle. (Tony Gehman had a great variation—have the kids disengage/press from straddle circle to pike circle and back again.)

The fourth drill is now a straddled seat circle. This is a good deal more difficult for the gymnast to maintain and do straddled. Make sure they are spotted at first and have a skill cushion underneath them. They may "stall out" and fall forwards, so teach them to do a straddled $\frac{3}{4}$ circle and drop to their feet straddle/piked, like the old "peach" drop to low bar in the '80 Olympic Compulsory .

The last drill in this line takes what they learned off the blocks and transfers it to a cast. The cast should be about horizontal to start and then work its way up to about 30° . The sole circle should still be piked or least a very narrow straddle. Since the Stalder comes in at about horizontal or a little below, I would teach the toe-on to come in about the same. Too late and they'll never get into the correct stalder position, legs and back parallel to the floor at the "bottom" of the skill. Less than this they will struggle with an early opening, too much and it will be too late.

Maintain and continue to improve flexibility and strength for the skill.

The Third Line of Drills

The first drill takes the jump off the block and with a spot starts to do a "stalder start" to a straddle seat circle. Here is where a crucial change starts. The jump starts out piking into the bar but then straddles to the straddled seat circle. This straddle is late and narrow, with the legs brushing the arms on the way in—it is important. The piked start is to reinforce the open push of the shoulders into the drop. The narrow straddle helps this but also helps prevent the gymnast from pulling in too soon to the straddle position. The legs/hips must rotate through quickly to get to the "bottom" of the skill. If they straddle early, there are two problems. One is the early pull of the arms, and the second is a wide straddle doesn't get you into the correct Stalder position. Even though you may be spotting them over the bar, the goal of this drill is still to reinforce and teach better technique

straddle position quickly and with more control. Shoulders now beginning roll into bottom position.



Pic. 5—Now almost into full compression; shoulders have closed to the position they'll "ride" through the bottom position, perpendicular to the legs. Head in neutral looking at the bar.



Pic. 6 –Bottom of the skill; note the compression of the legs with respect to the body; lower back and hamstring flexibility is critical to avoid muscle strains. Legs are parallel to the floor, arms are perpendicular to the legs. If the legs are angled more to the spotter, the gymnast may "come out" too soon*; too much and they'll have trouble opening correctly over the bar.

of the drop into the skill.

The rest of the drills are the same as line two, emphasize the cast to 30° on the last one. Still emphasize the piked start, but you can also let them try to do the late, narrow straddle to a straddled sole circle as well.

Maintain and continue to improve flexibility and strength for the skill.

The Fourth Line of Drills

The first drill here is the same as line three, but now we're going to circle the hips up at the end to place the feet on the bar at the top. This must be spotted and have proper matting underneath in case of a "stall and fall." Very often the gymnast won't have enough swing at the start so expect them to stall out a little too soon. Hold them, let them get their feet on the bar and push them up to the top where they can jump off safely. (Spotting the shoulders here works well for me.) The jump is still emphasizing the "piked start" and narrow straddle of the drop.

Now, we take this and try adding the stalder part of the drop to the cast. They've been doing the piked drop so far. Now they can try to add the narrow straddle into the Stalder position. The toes are "in" about horizontal or a little below, just like they trained in the previous line, but just as they are getting there, they now straddle the feet past the bar (narrow straddle) and into the Stalder position. You may also have to tell them to let their arms fold into the proper bottom position, but most of the time, if they have done the drills properly, they do it pretty naturally. As they come around in the circle first have them do a straddle seat circle to get over.

The Fifth Line of Drills

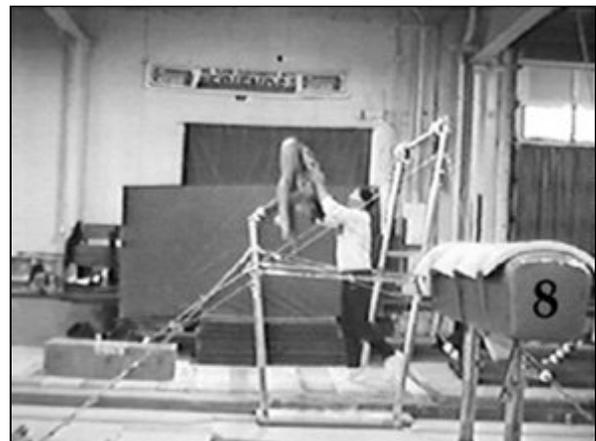
The first drill is the same as line four, but now we spot the gymnast to a straddled HS from the jump on the blocks. This is still spotted and emphasis is still placed on the proper drop technique, but now we add the opening of the arms toward a HS position for the skill.

The straddled press drill can now be used to teach pirouetting if the press is done correctly.

The cast to 30° or higher now changes to the skill being performed to a stand on the bar, just one step behind the



Pic. 7 –Hips begin lift to open; shoulders begin slight opening also.



Pic. 8 –Arms continue opening as hips lift. At this point the gymnast can do a straddled seat circle (third line of drills); lift to a straddled stand (line 4 drills); lift to a straddled HS (line 5); or finally to a full HS (line 6).



Pic. 9

drill we're having them learn jumping off the blocks. Still emphasis is placed on proper technique of the drop and bottom. Maintain and continue to improve flexibility and strength for the skill.

The Sixth and Seventh Lines of Drills

Well, at this point, things are starting to come together (if you've noticed the lines getting smaller). The jump drill is now getting spotted to HS, and the casting drill is finally a Stalder to a straddled HS. The seventh line here is finally the skill, a Stalder to HS, spotted at first and then alone. From a HS into the skill the drop is similar to the drop to a clearhip or glide, at about 30° above horizontal, everything we drilled comes into play. If we've done the drills well, it will be a little easier to perform out of the HS since there is more speed behind it.

Some Final Notes

When I first presented this lecture at Congress it was called "Developing Uneven Bar Progressions" and the stalder was the example I used. In the Proceedings Book, the chart of the drill didn't quite come out the way it was sent in (sort of an upside-down pyramid leading to the skill), but was listed in a numbered order that didn't fit the purpose and most certainly confused some people who read it ("29 Steps to Stalder"—sounds like an old Hitchcock movie). I am glad to have a chance to clear that up and explain that chart a little more fully.

As I stated earlier, there are other ways of teaching the Stalder. There is the multiple circle drill, similar to what we use for clearhips, but I found that for some kids it may reinforce straddling early, so I use that selectively. There is an additional use for the Tumble-Trak here. Pad the bar on the sides and let the gymnast compress to a straddle and then open the hips and arms to a HS to simulate the opening of the Stalder to a HS (or even just over the bar).

This is only one possible progression for teaching the skill. You will have to adapt these drills (as well as others) to the needs of the gymnasts you are teaching. The more ways you have of teaching it, the better your success rate will be. The last two pages list in the format for the late toe on and Stalder. Good luck, and have a great season.



Pic. 10



Pic. 11

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Photocopy of paper, no date or publisher

¹ Joseph Stalder of Switzerland performed the first credited "backward" Stalder. A "front stalder" is technically called an "Endo" or "Endo-shoot" after the Japanese gymnast who first performed it.

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