

Basic Swing: Technical Concept

When a gymnast has technically sound basic swing on the swinging events, his ability to learn skills will dramatically increase. Generally, technical refinement of basic swing is an on-going battle for most gymnasts throughout their career. It is easier to develop good swinging technique at the early stage of development than teaching physically mature gymnasts how to swing correctly. However, teaching proper basic swing takes a very long time and is less exciting particularly when just starting gymnastics, but once proper technique is developed, it will greatly enhance learning later.

The ideal technique for basic swing for all the events has changed over time. Skill trends, dictated by the Code of Points, often have a strong influence on how the basic swing will be done. Another factor which has had a subtle influence on the basic swing is the advancement and change of modern equipment. Newer apparatus are made with better materials and use technologically advanced designs. The subtle change of apparatus will effect the timing of the swing, as well as the shape of the swing, to make it efficient.

Here, we will briefly discuss how the modern basic swing should be done on Pommel Horse, Rings, Parallel Bars and High Bar events.

Pommel Horse

A technically sound double leg circle can be developed on the mushroom. The roundness of the mushroom enables gymnasts to swing circles with the body extended and smooth hip rotation. However, there are a few important technical aspects that we must always emphasize even on the mushroom. Following are some of the critical points to emphasize:

1. Keep the head in line with the body line throughout the circle, but particularly at the front support position, try not to bring the head downward to look at the hands.
2. Bring the chest upward and forward in the front support position (Not in hollow chest position) and maintain this position throughout.
3. Chest and hips must remain in a straight line through out the circle.
4. Encourage gymnasts to swing fast circles.
5. During the circle, the shoulders must be shrugged unless the gymnast is too weak to support himself and stay up.
6. Encourage shoulder lean sideways (both sides) while legs are crossing over the pommel.
7. Emphasize body tightness throughout the circle.

A mushroom drill for good technical circles

(Floor Mushroom)

1. Quarter circle to side support on one arm:

- a. Emphasize the circle action initiated with the whole body (Not from the toes).
- b. Arrive in one arm side support position with chest and hips open.
- c. Emphasize the use of both arms to generate the speed of circle.
- d. Start from a hips and chest open position (Eliminate any up and down motion).

2. Three quarter circle to support on one arm:

- a. Maintain extended chest and hips throughout (Should not be any noticeable change in body position).
- b. Encourage relaxed shoulder, but maintain firm body position.
- c. At the end of the side support position, heels should be leading the circle (It is important not to lead with hips at this point).

3. One and one-eighth circle

- a. Hips and the entire body rotate together to initiate the 2nd circle.
- b. Important to maintain chest and hips open through out (No lifting of any part of the body).
- c. Encourage use of both hands on the mushroom to initiate body rotation.
- d. Both hands remain on the horse at the end.

This drill is an excellent one to use for a gymnast who has just learned circles to even an elite level gymnast who needs refinement of the circle technique. Most gymnasts should spend the first 10-15 min. of Pommel Horse work on this drill.

Leg Swing on Pommel Horse

Following are the important points to emphasize in leg cuts and scissor work.

1. Maintain the center of the hips in the middle of the horse during the stride swing.
2. Head and chest stay upright throughout the swing (Not looking down and supporting in hollow chest position).
3. Straddle legs sideways wide throughout the swing.
4. Always lead the swing with the first leg—which is the first leg in the direction of the swing.

Rings

Learning proper “under” swing technique can lead to all levels of skills essential to ring swing. Technically good forward swing will develop into giant dislocate, back giant and all levels of backward salto dismounts. Similarly, technically good under swing backward will develop into giant inlocate, front giant and also all levels of forward salto dismounts. Often times, when a gymnast starts to work on advanced skills such as Guozoghy or double layout 1/1 dismount, they need to go back to the refinement of the basic swing because the technical essence for these advanced skills lies in the efficiency of the turn over power in

the basic under swing. Therefore, we will discuss the technique of under swing forward and backward in detail here.

Under Swing

When a gymnast works on under swing at the earliest stage, the technical emphasis should be placed only in one direction of the swing (forward or backward) at a time.

Under Swing Forward

1. At the highest point in the back swing, the shoulders should be well extended and the rings are pushed out slightly forward and sideways. The body should be maintained in an arch from the upper chest area to ensure smooth kick through the bottom.
2. From the top of the swing, continuous shoulder extension toward the bottom of the swing must be maintained. This helps to maintain the arched body until the bottom of the swing.
3. At the bottom, kick the legs through forward and upward to make the entire body turn over as quickly as possible. This efficient body turn over action is the most critical part of the swing. Gymnasts should attempt to kick from the upper chest at the bottom. This will help the shoulders to remain extended and stay down until the entire body completely turns over.
4. The rings should not be pulled backward until the entire body is well turned over and the feet are pointed directly toward the ceiling.
5. After the completion of the entire body turn over, the rings can be pressed downward as high as the swing will allow. It is important to note that any widening of the rings, elevating of the shoulders or pulling of the rings backward should not occur prior to the completion of the body turn over.

Under Swing Backward

1. From the previously mentioned turned over position, the body should swing down in hollow position without losing pressure on the rings.
2. The shoulders and upper back should lead the downward swing which would ensure a smooth backward kicking action through the bottom of the swing.
3. At the bottom, vigorous kicking of the heels and the body turn over action occurs.
4. During the turn over phase, the head should stay down to facilitate the heel lift.
5. Again, the kick should be done in the upper chest and the shoulders remain low throughout the turn over phase.
6. If the gymnast does not have flexible shoulders, the rings could be pressed slightly sideways, but it is important the shoulders remain down in the fully extended position.
7. Once the heels have risen upward and the toes are directed upward toward the ceiling, the

shoulders can then be elevated along with the head. At this point, the rings can be pressed down to elevate the shoulders as much as the swing will allow.

Parallel Bars

There are four types of basic swings on PB namely, arm support swing, upper arm swing, under bar swing and giant swings. All these basic swings are equally important to performing good routines, but many of the advanced and trendy skills are done in the arm support swing form or in the giant swing forms.

Arm Support Swing

1. Arm support swing should be done without excessive hip pike. All the kicking action must be done in the upper chest which allows the body to be in a straight line most of the time.
2. In forward swing, it is important that the body approach the bottom of the swing in an arched position from the chest, then, kick through the bottom. Properly executed beat swing at the bottom, should generate powerful forward and upward swing.
3. Every time the body swings through the bottom, encourage gymnasts to shrug the shoulders for a more powerful and freer swing.
4. The head position at the end of the forward swing, should not be lifted upward and backward excessively. Rather, the head should be pressed slightly forward to minimize the shoulders leaning backward.
5. In backward swing, the natural heel drive at the bottom will cause a slight arch in the body on the way up to the handstand. The arched point in the lower back at the bottom of the swing, should be shifted up to the upper chest as the swing reaches the vertical. Then, the last 20 degrees prior to the handstand, the upper chest should be pushed into a hollow position.

Upper Arm Support Swing

1. The ideal body position for upper arm support swing is to support the hands from the shoulders as wide as shoulder strength can handle.
2. The body action during the forward swing should be very similar to the backward giant swing on HB.
3. The forward swing should start from the hollow position at the highest point of the swing. Then, a natural opening of the chest prior to the bottom. This properly arched position will ensure a powerful kick through the bottom. After the kick, the body assumes into the natural hollow position prior to the opening of the body at the top of the swing.
4. The body action of the backward swing, should be identical to the under swing backward, not a forward giant on HB.
5. From the top of the forward swing (beginning of the backward swing), the body should

be as extended as possible when the body starts to descend. The body should go into a slight arch as the body passes through bar height. Then, a quick hollowing of the chest and a slight hip pike should occur in preparation for the beat (kick) through the bottom. The kick will be initiated from the lower back, but must continuously move up to the upper chest.

In learning the backward swing, it is important to learn to kick through “long” (meaning learn to kick through from the chest) at the bottom. The shorter kick through the bottom, which is used for the skills such as back uprise straddle cut or back Stutz, is easier to learn at a later time.

Both swings forward and backward should end in body vertical positions leaving the hands on the bar.

Under Bar Swing

The under bar swing can be done from a gliding action, a jump or a drop from the support swing position. The most important part of the swing is being in the basket position under the bar. A gymnast must learn how to create swing when he is in this position. Then, he can apply this swing to various form of swings such as cast, peach basket or kips.

Basket Swing

In the still basket hang position, the gymnast must learn how to create swing.

In order to create swing from a still position, he must first elevate his shoulders and lift the hips upward and forward while slightly opening the legs away from the body. This will create a small swing backward (counter clockwise).

Then with quick action on the returning swing forward, the shoulders should be extended down and the legs should be compressed down toward the chest right at the bottom of the swing.

Immediately lifting the shoulders up forward, along with the slight kick of the legs, should create a small swing around the bottom.

This process should be repeated to build the bigger swing.

There are number of other ways to help them learn this basket swing. Following are examples of those exercises:

- Drop kip drill from the support swing.
- From the support position, drop backward into the basket swing position and swing forward, then do a kip up to support.
- Under bar cast forward at the end of the bar.
- Standing in between the bars facing out at the end of the bars, simply lift the legs up to the bar and basket swing forward. The swing should go forward and upward in a high arc and land as far from the bar as possible.

Giant Swing

The giant swing may well be the most advanced swing among all the basic swings. Theoretically, a gymnast who can do a technically correct back giant on HB should be able to do the PB giant swing. In other words, if a gymnast has a technical problem in his HB giant, it will affect his PB giant the same way. The grip on PB's makes it difficult to hang on to the bars if there is any jerking in the shoulders as the body approaches the bottom of the swing. Therefore, the shoulders must be extended maximally during the down swing.

Ideally, the second half of the giant should be very similar to the back giant except for the hand change at the end. A very common mistake we often see is releasing the hands too early and ending in an excessively arched position at the handstand. Generally, this is caused by a very short kick through the bottom (kick is done from the hips only) and the body does not turn over far enough.

There are many different drills to work on each segment of the giant on PB. It is better to start on a smaller swing and gradually build to a bigger swing.

Following are some examples of the drills to develop a partial giant:

- Small bail to swing through the bottom.
- From a small bail, hop upper arm support.
- From a bail, tucked flyaway on the end of the bar.
- From the handstand, bail to the bottom of the swing and stop using an 8 inch skill cushion.

Horizontal Bar

Most gymnasts learn a giant swing forward and backward at an early age. However, many gymnasts neglect to refine their giant swing to the point where they can easily develop the tap swing for Kovacs or a Chinese tap for dismounts. Unfortunately, many gymnasts must spend hours to re-learn technically correct giants before they learn many advanced skills such as Kovacs or a good double layout.

Giant Swing

The most important concept of giant swing is to make the body move in one unit. The arms and the upper body and also the legs and the lower part of the body must move as one unit. In order for the arms and the upper body to move together, the shoulders must be fully extended all the time. Similarly, the buttocks must be tightened to connect the legs and the lower body when arching and kicking action occurs at the bottom the swing.

Back Giant

From the handstand position, the upper body goes into a slightly hollow position as the feet start to descend. This subtle action should continue until the body passes through the horizontal.

The head should be in between the arms and the shoulders and should not be lifted up excessively during this phase.

When the body passes through the horizontal, a natural opening of the entire body should

occur (slight arching action of the chest area). Therefore, the chest is the only body part which is moved from the hollow position to the arched position in this phase.

The opening of the chest area should promote a shoulder extension and at this point the shoulders are leading the swing through the bottom.

A natural kicking action from the chest should occur through the bottom. This kicking action from the chest region (no hip pike) should end well above the horizontal. At the end of the kick, the body is back to a slight hollow position.

The opening action of the body will elevate the body vertically and then settle into a nice extended handstand position.

Front Giant

From the handstand position, the heels must lead the initial descending of the giant swing. The body should be in a slightly arched position from the chest area and the shoulders are extended as far out as possible. During the first 90 degrees of giant, it is very critical not to lose shoulder tension and the shoulders should never lead the swing. Accelerating the giant by slightly thrusting the heels forward and downward will help maintain shoulder tension during this phase.

Once the body passes through the horizontal, it becomes easier to maintain the shoulder tension toward the bottom of the swing.

The first half of the giant, the shoulder should be hyper-extended slightly to maintain good extension. However, the body should be only slightly arched from the upper chest with no excessive arch in the lower back (the body should look fairly straight).

At the bottom of the swing, the shoulders should be continuously extended downward and the heels should lead the swing. At this point, the entire body will go through a more arched position to maximize the heel drive.

A slight elevation of the shoulders and the chest area after the bottom of the swing will increase the upward rotation of the giant. The momentum generated from this lifting action (it should be a very smooth lifting action) is enough to open the body toward the handstand position very nicely.

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