

Twist Preparation and its Relationship to the Pirouette

By Jack Carter

Carter's Gymnastics Academy, Mesa, AZ

Twisting direction is one of the most important decisions to make in a young gymnast's career. The direction of the pirouette is an equal part of that equation. The question for the ages is: **which direction do we teach twisting?** There are many self-named experts on the subject, all of which throw out a load of hooey that confuses most of us. **I have an opinion on the subject; however, it is not a solid method for determination. There is no such method. As soon as you think that you know, and have a set opinion, some mutant will come along and break all of your rules. So, here goes:**

The first determination is what I call the half turn, half turn test.

The first thing that is needed is 21 lines on the vault runway. All must be evenly spaced (about 2' feet apart.) The athlete does twenty jump $\frac{1}{2}$ turns in succession. Each time the athlete has a landing that strikes the mark (the majority of the foot.) it counts as a hit. Do left twist first, and then follow with the right. Do both tests several times, or until you can draw a fairly conclusive decision as to the direction that has the greatest accuracy.



The next test will help to indicate twist direction, but will also help to determine whether the athlete feels (haptic), or see's (optic.)

It is the full turn test. The test is started on a cross mark on the floor. The athlete starts first by setting her feet perfectly on the mark. She then closes her eyes tightly, and executes a full turn. When she thinks she has completed the turn she must stop first, then open her eyes at your command. The score is given on how many degrees she is from a perfect turn. Do the test in both directions several times. After you have a solid number of hits in either direction, count the hits and come to a determination as to the side with the greatest accuracy. I believe that you will find that it correlates with the scores from the first test.

The final test is to determine the degree of haptic vs. optic orientation that each of the individuals possess.

This, in large part, is ignored, mainly because of the lack of understanding that a vast majority of the coaching community has regarding the relationship of feel vs. see. The test is purely kinesthetic in nature, and should probably precede the other tests, by virtue of the primitive data that is gleaned from it. This test will enable you to better understand what you are seeing as the athlete undertakes the other tests, and how to better interpret that data.

Start the test by asking the athlete to stand facing away from a horizontal mark on the wall. They are then asked to extend both arms in a perfect horizontal line, without looking at them. The nearest to horizontal would indicate an athlete with a larger degree of haptic awareness. This will also indicate the degree in which an athlete needs to "see" in order to be oriented in certain skills. Facing the wall and viewing the horizontal mark can also be done. I have never done the test in that manner; however, I would be interested in knowing results of the altered test.

I have added a grid to the picture to better ascertain the level of awareness that these athletes have. If it makes any difference, they are both left twisters. The athlete on the left is a predominant "optic" athlete, while the one on the right is a predominant "haptic" athlete. P> These are the simplest ways to determine twist direction and teaching approach. They are not infallible, however they suffice where there is usually nothing but Mom, Dad, or an Academy Coach telling a kid to jump and spin.

On the average, most athletes will twist the direction of their first striking hand in a round-off. Left hand down, twist left. Right, right. I think you get the idea. The problem with this is; the striking hand is usually the dominant pirouette hand. Which in fact would have them twisting on bars in the opposite direction of their twisting on floor. This isn't very problematic except for the hop twisting that will eventually come to them as they progress in the sport. I have literally pulled the hair from my head when I was unable to teach some of my top athletes a hop full. It's just a back layout with a full twist. It's not that hard, unless you are twisting in the wrong direction.

Therefore, it can be concluded that pirouetting be taught in the same direction as the natural twist direction. Right twist athletes, pirouette with the left hand and blind turn on the right. Left twist athletes pirouette with the right hand and blind turn on the left. Many will argue that it will take longer to teach the pirouette than if they were allowed to turn on the "dominant" hand, to which I strongly disagree. There will be no difference in the length of time used to gain mastery of the pirouette. If anything it will be decidedly decreased, based entirely on the concept of natural twisting direction.

The preceding tests can be done at the very early stages of development. As a matter of opinion, I suggest that the determination be made as early as 5 to 6 years old. I believe strongly that deciding on a course of action, then following it, is the key to coaching success. If twisting is done in the same direction on all events, the athlete will have a greater ability to transfer skills from event to event. Moreover, the onset of awareness will have been started at an extremely impressionable time.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this article, feel free to contact by e-mail at: JCarter453@aol.com.