

SPOTTING TECHNIQUES FOR PROGRESSIVE TUMBLING  
IN GIRLS GYMNASTICS

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to present a gathering of spotting techniques which were being used successfully in the instruction of tumbling at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

There are many times in conducting gymnastic instruction that lack of attention is given to spotting. If spotting is taught continually with each stunt no matter how basic the stunt, there will be progressive learning. Attention is given to the instruction of the stunt. Spotting aids in the instruction of that stunt, therefore, importance should also fall upon spotting.

Photos demonstrating proper and successful spotting techniques may be used as a teaching aid.

### INTRODUCTION

Progressions and spotting are keys to successful teaching of tumbling. The fear of injury need not be present if the unit is developed correctly. Application of kinesiological principles and practice of spotting techniques will give the uninitiated teacher more confidence. The members of the class will be able to control each other's movements if the teacher presents an understanding of spotting techniques to the class.

Spark can be put into tumbling by the excitement of accomplishment, especially when the stunt is one which has a difficult rating.

It is a familiar teaching technique to divide the whole of the finished stunt into parts for the ease of learning. Progressions are used to develop strength and coordination in the execution of each step toward the final accomplishment. The eight or nine leadup stunts may seem unrelated as they are learned, but by relating the simple and familiar to the new, the student will be surprised to find that she has learned a difficult stunt.

As the class progresses, some students will be left at different levels along the way. Even so, all will have had some measure of accomplishment. This step-by-step procedure will overcome the fear which some of the students have toward the more difficult stunts. In this way, one will not lose the students who arbitrarily decide that they cannot do them and will not try. The class as a whole will build in excitement as the parts of the whole are put together. With correct spotting the students will be able to work with each other in putting the progressions together well enough to see the possibility of their own success. Thus, they will work harder to achieve the whole. Spotting is a most important action not only for safety, but for learning. Given the responsibility for someone else, students soon learn they must listen well and perform with confidence each spotting procedure.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much has been written in regard to teaching tumbling stunts. In each book reviewed several different procedures were given for new ways to present or teach stunts. Spotting takes a second place in all of the literature read. It needs to be pointed out at this time that very few stunts are ever taught successfully without spotting. In fact it is considered a risk and poor teaching to allow the student to attempt stunts without some type of aid or assistance. With this in mind spotting should gain importance. At no time in any of the literature reviewed for this study was there any depth given to spotting or spotting techniques.

All teachers will use slightly different progressions and spotting techniques. The following material presents some spotting and teaching cues that will enable the tumbling classes to utilize spotters in group presentation.

1. Partners should be of the same size and weight.
2. For efficiency during the entire unit, spend most of the first period on organization and orientation of the large class. Teach one or two simple stunts to emphasize spotting, listening, and trust in partners or spotters.
3. Good spotting must be taught. Many times, the spotter will work harder than the tumbler. The spotter must know what the stunt is to be, the direction of force, and what position to take. None of this will be of any value if the girl does not actually practice stepping in and helping when needed.
4. With the introduction of anything new, check the body position of the tumblers and the spotters. Correct the positions if necessary before giving the command to attempt the stunt.



5. Practice spotting with a few exceptional students before the unit. It is best, however, to present a stunt by using a student who is not particularly good for demonstration. The class can see your spotting procedure and the possibility that they might all be able to learn the stunt.

Spotting each stunt from the beginning level through the advanced level is a successful way to build an excellent tumbling program. Students should progress at spotting the same way they do in learning tumbling stunts. With each stunt taught they should learn how to spot it and in that way they become more active and more alert.

Every one in the class should be a spotter, not just the instructor. It is essential in a tumbling class that spotting techniques be taught to all students as each stunt is taught. All students may be spotters of beginning stunts as long as they know where to stand and how to properly place the hands on the student during the stunt. Demonstrating proper spotting techniques on each stunt, no matter how simple the stunt, should be planned into each tumbling unit. Make sure all girls learn how to spot and get practice in spotting. If they learn how to spot the simple stunts, they will then be better able and more willing to spot the difficult stunts.<sup>2</sup>

Confidence is gained by everyone involved in a tumbling unit where safety is taught. Spotting each student and the extra duty of having each student spot for one another leads to a controlled learning situation. Tumbling is difficult for many girls because of the contorted positions the body must achieve and maintain. Spotting a student through a strange movement for the first time can make it easier. Then, having the student spot gives them a chance to see the movement from different angles.

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<sup>1</sup>American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation. "Teaching Tumbling to Seven or Seventy," Washington D. C.: NEA. 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Eric Hughes, Gymnastics for Girls. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1963) p. 9.

For the student who finds gymnastics too difficult after trying many of the stunts, spotting could be a place in the tumbling unit where they would find success and achievement while aiding other students in their progress. It can be to the instructor's benefit to encourage students who want to spot and teach them the use of the hand belt and the overhead spotting rig. When they learn the use of these two spotting aids they may spot many of the more difficult stunts, thus leaving the instructor free to observe the stunt being done and make comments to the student for correction. A good spotter is an important asset in the tumbling unit.

It is important that no student be forced to spot a stunt that they feel insecure about spotting. If there is a hesitation in spotters the performer can usually sense it and may lose confidence. This loss of confidence can lead to lack of trust and slow the learning down. Confidence and trust are very important in the progression of learning.

Spotting can be made easier by following a few general rules.

1. Always know what the performer plans to do before you consent to spot.
2. Discuss with a partner the safest way to spot the stunt.
3. Don't overspot the performer (give too much assistance to) as this is sometimes as dangerous as failing to spot at all.
4. When possible make use of other safety devices such as a handbelt, overhead safety rig, and protective mats, in addition to handspot for difficult stunts.
5. When necessary the spotter should center his support near the head and shoulders of the performer. This slows down the downward fall of the head and should allow the feet to hit the floor first.
6. Do not catch, lift, or hold the performer unless necessary. Many times only a slight tap or touch is necessary for confidence.
7. Stay close to the performer but do not hinder or restrict normal movements of the stunts.

8. Don't let your attention be distracted while the performer is in action.
9. Don't spot a performer unless you understand and know exactly what to do.
10. Ask for help<sup>3</sup> if you feel the stunt will require more than one spotter.

Cooperation is quite easy to maintain when all the students are taking part in the activity. Spotting gives the student a chance to take part and be active at all times during the class. Only students who are hurt would need to remain out of the activity going on in the tumbling unit.

The spotter should be taught proper lifting techniques since it is often required. The spotter may find it advisable to use a wrist wrap for support. The legs should be used when a large amount of lifting is to be done.

Here are a few general rules for lifting which should be taught to all spotters:

1. Stand close to the performer and assume a wide base.
2. Keep your back straight and bend at the hips and knees. Squat, do not bend, regardless of how light the performer may be.
3. Lower your body only as far as is necessary, directly downward, keeping the hips tucked.
4. Grasp the performer close to the center of gravity of the body.
5. Avoid arching the back when lifting and lowering the performer in aerial work.
6. Force should be applied as nearly as possible in the desired line of direction. When a rotatory motion is desired, apply the force away from the center of the performer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Barry L. Johnson, A Beginner Book of Gymnastics (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Corbin and others, Concepts in Physical Education. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1970), pp. 88-90.

In many cases the spotter should not be lifting hard since the performer should maintain the movement. The spotter should know these rules for the benefit they will provide should a situation warrant their use.

Most spotting will be hand spotting but there are extra spotting aids which if available should be used.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SPOTTING POSITIONS

#### Forward Roll

The student is concentrating on keeping his body weight primarily on his hands and arms, while lowering gently onto the upper back during the roll therefore the spotter kneels at the side of the mat, spotting with one hand on the student's head to ensure that it is correctly tucked under; and the other hand rests on the student's side to guide the body throughout the roll. The hand may be used to lift the hips and hold them until the student comes to the shoulders, landing not on the neck or head. See Figure 1.



Figure 1.  
Forward Roll

### Dive Roll

Use double thickness mats while learning and avoid contact with the head or neck unless such contact can be carefully controlled. The spotting can be very effectively done with the aid of a handbelt. Two spotters, one on each side, run with the student. During the take off they keep the ropes out of the way so that the student's arms can swing freely. When she is in the air, the spotters hold the ropes taut and give a lift to her movements to help her make a smooth landing. If a belt is not used, one spotter kneels on the mat close to where the student will land. With one hand she spots the student's head to make sure the chin is tucked toward the chest, placing the other hand on the student's lower back to slow her down and to support some of the weight of the body. Extra care is given when the performer is diving high over objects that she is not pushed back into the object. It is difficult to spot a dive roll and dives of height should be avoided by students who are weak, unless a belt may be used. See Fig. 2.



Figure 2.  
Dive Roll

### Straddle Forward Roll

Stand to one side of the student so as not to be hit by the legs. Move in and give a lift on the buttocks to help lift the student to straddle position.

Care should be taken to lift and not to push down on the neck as the roll is taken. If the student's legs are not kept straight it will be extremely hard to spot this roll successfully. See Fig. 3



Figure 3. Straddle Forward Roll

### Backward Roll

The spotter should lift some of the student's weight as the stunt is being learned. This can be done by standing and reaching over the buttocks of the girl with one hand on each hip, or by kneeling beside her and lifting with one hand

under the hip or front of the thigh. The spotter should not push on the lower back of the student to help her over as this often results in injury to the neck.

For the first few trials a spotter should kneel on both knees next to the student's back and as the student rolls backward and begins the push with the arms, the spotter lifts and assists the student through the momentary hold. Two spotters may be used by those who have difficulty controlling direction because of turning the head to the side. See Fig. 4.



Figure 4. Backward Roll

#### Back Extension-Backward Roll to Handstand

For beginners, have a spotter on each side. Spotters grasp legs as they are extended upward and help to lift the person to the handstand position.



Then let go as the snap-down takes place. Spotters should have a wide stance for balance since the lift upwards will be jerky and should be held momentarily. Timing is important and the stunt should go slowly at first with the spotters lifting from the tuck position into the extension.

Speed should be increased gradually. Less lifting should take place by the spotter and the student should be smoother in their snap to the hand stand. The spotters should keep one hand on the student's waist during the snap-down to control the direction downward.

Two spotters may be used differently as the students gain control but still are having trouble with timing. One may stand grasping the leg with one hand and extending her other arm across the calves of the legs for balance. The other spotter kneels beside the student and lifts at the shoulder and straightens the arms for support. Timing is extremely important and should be stressed. The spotters must coordinate their lift with the hip action of the student for the move to be done with the greatest amount of success and the least amount of effort. See Figures 5 and 6.

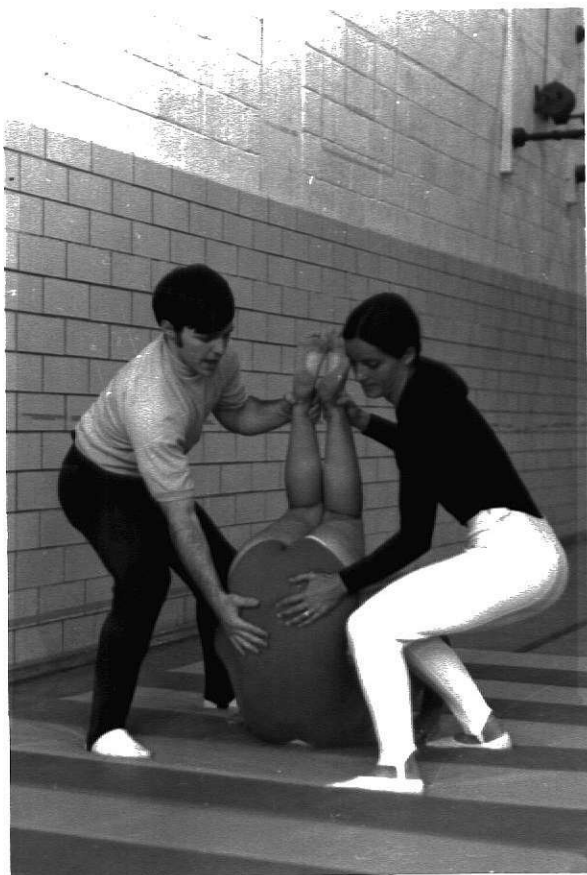


Figure 5.  
Back Extension-Backward Roll to Handstand

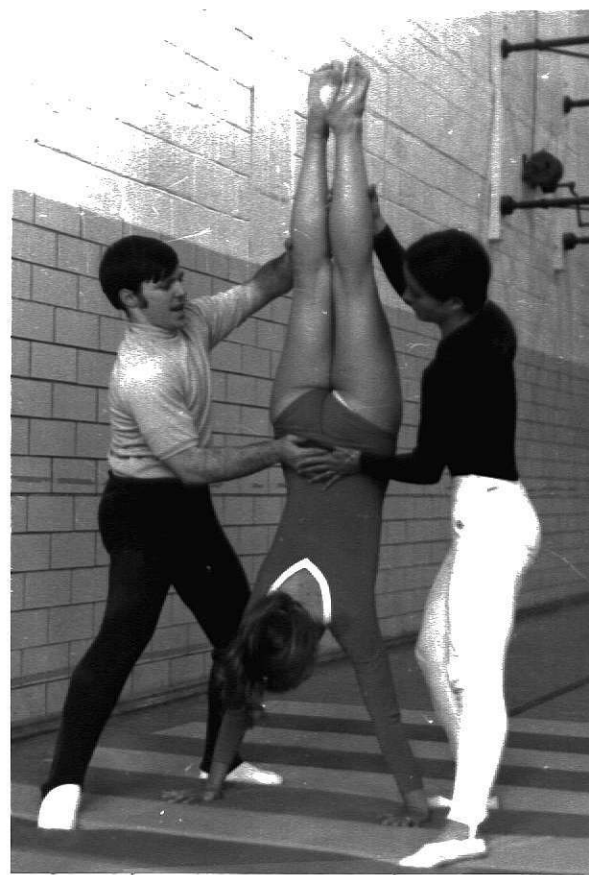


Figure 6.

### Backbends

Spotters should be used even when the performer is warming up with bridge position so that they may correct the body position. Two spotters are used. They kneel beside the performer and place one hand on the lower back and one on the shoulder of the arm just at the arm pit. They lift ever so slightly and make sure the feet stay flat and the hands are turned to the correct direction. Elbows should be straight. See Figure 7.

A second position for spotting, stand with your body in front of the student. Place one foot in front of you, between the feet of the student. Allow your weight to shift onto the front foot as the student moves backward. Reverse the action for recovery. See Figure 8.



Figure 7.

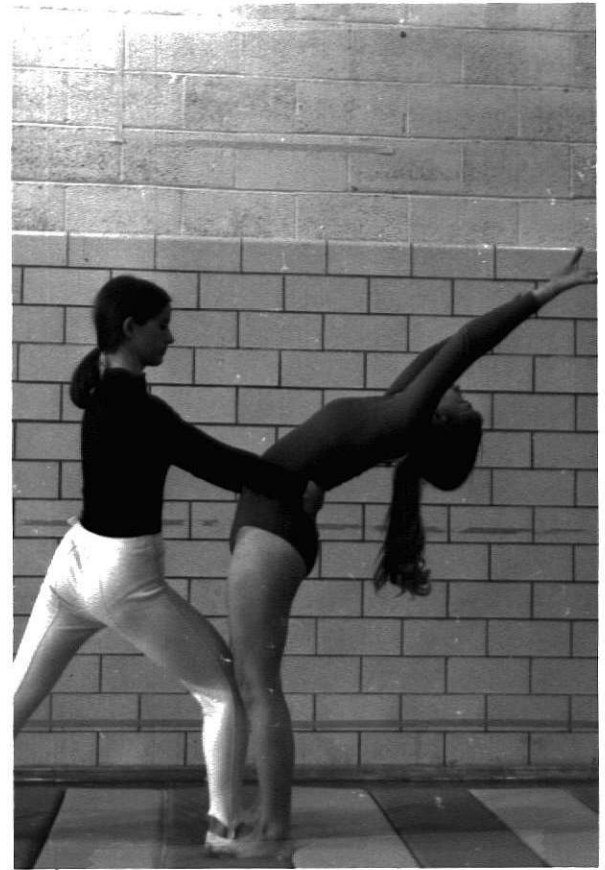


Figure 8.

### Backbends

The spotter using the second position should be strong enough not to be pulled off balance by the student performing the stunt or the student could come down on her head and neck if the arms give way.

A second spotter can be used at the side of the performer to correctly lead the arms and back into position as the descent is made to the floor. This will also take some of the weight out of the first spotter's hands.

During recovery the spotter must keep the arms and head of the student back until the student is standing. The student wants to bring her arms and head forward too soon, thus falling on her seat.

One spotter may be all that is needed if the students show correct position and strength in their arms on the first tries. Then one spotter is all that is needed to check positioning. Backbends are very important and should be done many times a class period to build flexibility for other stunts. Spotters should always be used for safety.

### Headstands

Two spotters should be used with beginners so that the neck doesn't receive damage. One spotter kneels beside the student and places her right hand in the small of the back and gives lift and support. The second spotter stands to the side and grasps the legs of the student when they are raised upward. Girls with weak arms should always have two spotters until they are stronger. Headstands may be practiced with the wall as a spotter. The spotter should be alert enough to catch the student should there be a loss of balance. A forward roll may be taken if balance is lost and the spotter should make sure the head is out of the way and the student lands on the shoulder blades, not on the neck. See Fig. 9.



Figure 9. Headstand

### Handstand

Handstands, like headstands, may be practiced against a wall before they are tried in the open. To do a handstand, a student must have enough strength in her arms to support her own weight. Spotters should check for this before the stunt is tried.

The spotter stands at the side to steady the student's legs until she can hold the handstand without support. When spotting a student who is practicing against the wall, the spotter should place half the body between the wall and the student and grasp the legs as they are extended upward. The student should not be allowed to fall into the wall, if it can be avoided. The spotter may either

push on the back of the legs strongly enough to force the student to fall back toward the hands or the spotter may hold the leg closest to her and lower the student to the mat gently. See Fig. 10.

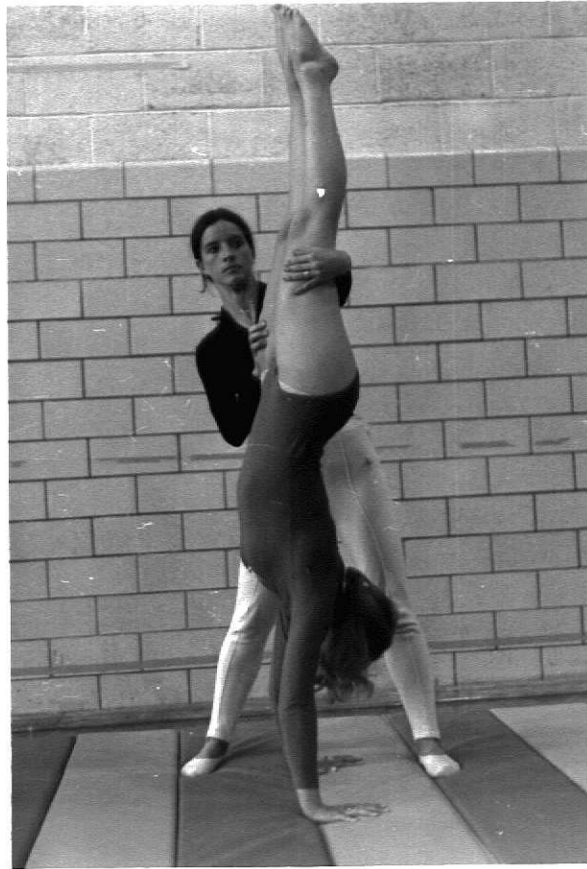


Figure 10. Handstand

#### Handstand Forward Roll

The spotter helps to control the descent by supporting at the thighs. A second spotter can kneel beside the performer and tuck the head to start the forward roll and support the neck until the weight lands on the shoulders and the roll is completed. See Fig. 11.

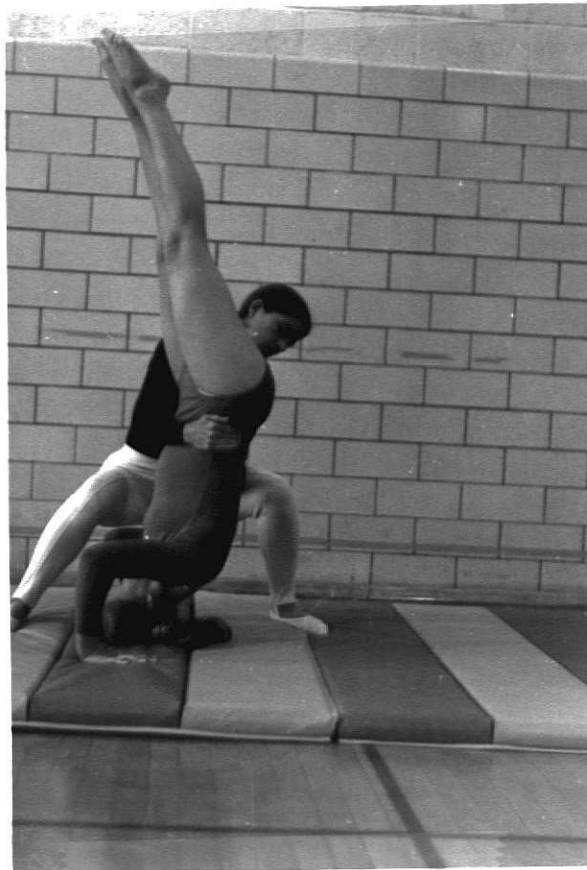


Figure 11. Handstand Forward Roll

### Cartwheel

The spotter stands behind the student with her arms crossed, left on top, holding onto the student's hips. When she swings into the upside-down position, the spotter's arms will be in a normal position to support the handstand and guide the motion to the end, when her arms will be crossed again, right arm now on the top. The spotter's job is to give some lift and keep the student from bending forward. She has to move in the direction of the cartwheel in order to give support throughout the cartwheel. See Fig. 12 and Fig. 13.

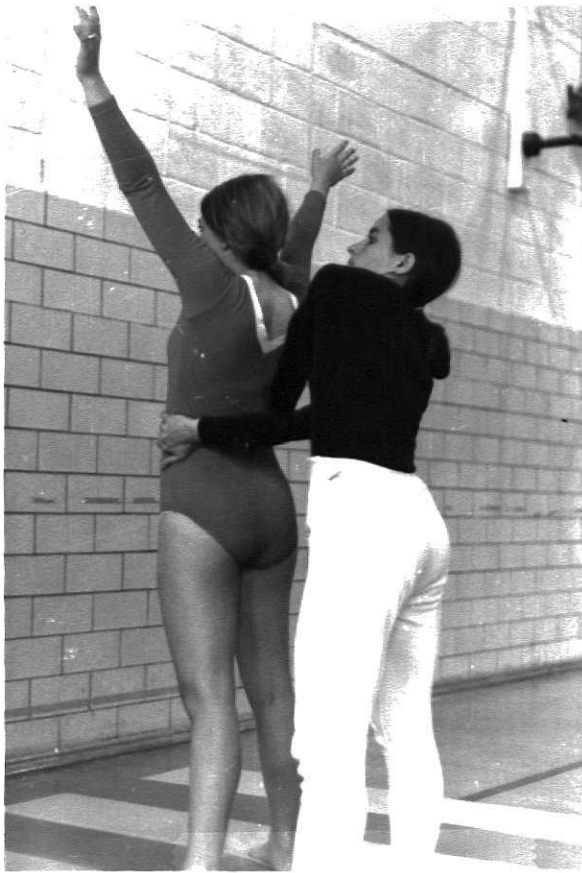


Figure 12.

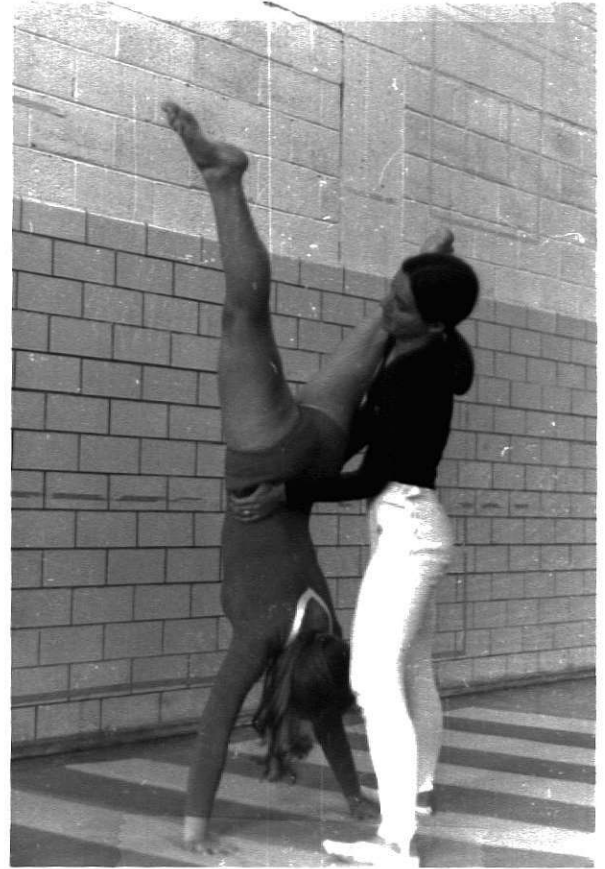


Figure 13.

### Cartwheel

The spotter should be strong enough to hold the legs of the student while she is in the upside-down position and keep her from swinging around in a circle to the front instead of passing over the top in a balance position. She should watch for people with sway backs so as not to be kicked by the legs as they pass through the handstand position. Bending the knees will lower the spotters center of gravity and her legs should be in a slight stride position for better control of balance when the weight is being held up. A second spotter could be used to keep the arms from bending and aid at the head and shoulders to check for correct form.



### Flying Cartwheel (Dive Cartwheel)

The spotter stands behind the student and catches at her hips to make the landing on the hands safer. A handbelt may be used to learn the stunt. The belt ropes must be twisted one in front and one in back so the student will not be tangled in the belt as she twists for the cartwheel. The spotter keeps the rope tight and lifts as the student goes into the dive so that the control is in the landing on the hands. Wrists may be wrapped on the student to accept more weight. A crash pad or double mats should be used for landing during learning or practice. See Fig. 14 and Fig. 15.



Figure 14. Flying Cartwheel

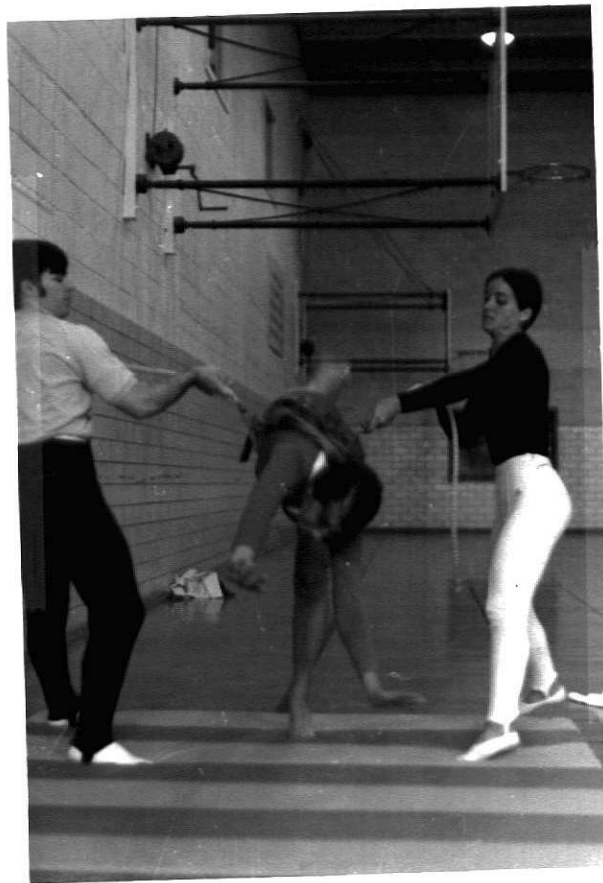


Figure 15. Flying Cartwheel

#### Aerial Cartwheel

The spotter stands behind the student to her right. When the student's legs have swung upward, the spotter gives an upward lift at her left side, and with her other hand guides the movement toward the right. Using another spotting method, she can grasp the student by the waist with both hands and lift her upward during the stunt. Again a handbelt may be used for spotting and the same position is taken as on a dive cartwheel. See Fig. 16 and Fig. 17.

The student should throw into a double mat or crash pad for a softer landing. Aerial cartwheels tend to make the ankle sore on the landing leg.

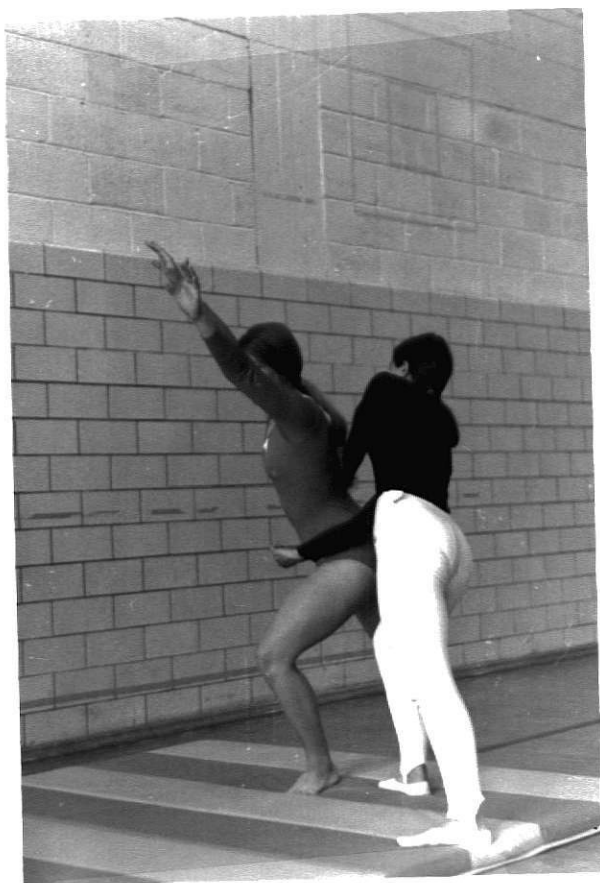


Figure 16.

## Aerial Cartwheel



Figure 17.

In the aerial cartwheel success depends very much on an especially vigorous take-off. During the running steps at the beginning, the arms swing forward and up and the knee of the take-off leg is raised high, then brought forward and down to a deep bend for a strong push with the take-off foot. The spotter should lift during the push off. The spotter should avoid being in the way of the arms so as not to be hit or cause the student to fall.

If a handbelt is being used the spotters will run along with the performer so they should practice the run a few times to get the rhythm. Remember the student should set the pace so the spotters must be able to keep up and not pull the student back.

### Round-Off

It is difficult for a spotter to aid in a round-off without getting in the way. The spotter may be used to moving the student through the movement slowly at first but when the stunt is done the spotter should not be in the way. The spotter starts in the same position as for a cartwheel and moves to the spotting position for a mule kick to finish the walk through. The spotter may stand close behind the student, a little to the right and supports on the hips to guide the turn. She pulls the student toward her into a slightly off-balance position to make the turning easier for the student's left hand. See Fig. 18.

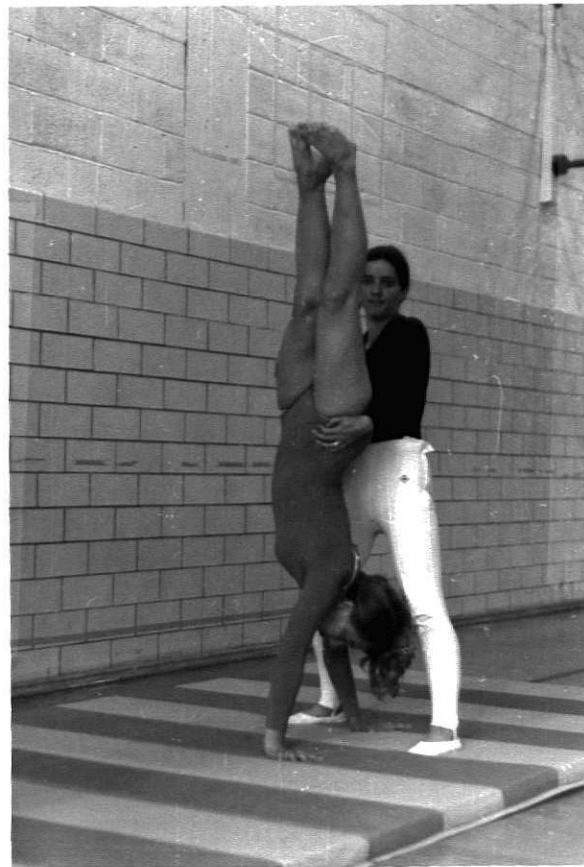


Figure 18. Round-Off