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# Teaching The Hammer Throw: How To Get A Beginner To Throw In Just Days

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*Just what the title of this piece indicates, a brief guide to getting youngsters started in hammer throwing invoking the KISS method, "Keep it simple, stupid."*

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A few years ago the hammer throw wasn't even on the radar of most high school coaches. During the past decade, however, the event has grown at an unprecedented rate at high schools across the country. While the hammer throw is only regularly contested at high schools in one state (Rhode Island), it has grown all over the country thanks to its inclusion in the Junior Olympics and other competitions. Statistician Bob Gourley compiles a yearly performance list of every high school boy who throws over 150 feet and every high school girl who surpasses 120 feet. During the last decade, the number of throwers on that list has doubled from 51 boys from eight states to 105 boys from 19 states and 33 girls in eight

states to 65 girls in 17 states.

The event offers a unique opportunity for youth athletes to get a leg up on the competition and earn a college scholarship or just the chance to continue their career at the collegiate level. While the event looks complex, it is a fun event that can be learned quickly.

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## WHAT YOU NEED

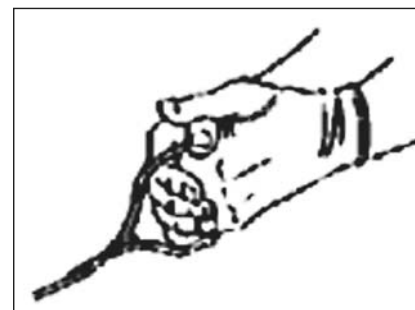
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1. *A ring and cage.* The hammer is thrown from a seven-foot ring. This is slightly smaller than a discus ring, but for training purposes a discus ring will work just fine. A discus cage should also be sufficient to protect spectators from potentially errant throws.

2. *A field.* The hammer can cause

divots when it lands. However, beginning throwers will not be throwing far enough to do much damage and can use almost any field with a discus cage.

3. *A hammer.* High school boys throw a 12-pound hammer while the girls throw a 4-kilogram (8.8-pound) hammer. Hammers can be ordered through all track and field suppliers.



The proper grip for a right-handed thrower

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*By G. Martin Bingisser and Ryan E. Jensen, Canada*

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If possible, it is best to learn with a lighter than competition weight hammer. Shorter hammers are also easier to learn with.

4. *A glove.* A glove is not necessary for beginners, but more advanced throwers will want a glove to protect their hand. Hammer throw gloves are available, but a leather gardening glove will also work just fine. The hammer glove is worn on the left hand for right-handed throwers.

### Step 1: Pick up the hammer

A right-handed thrower should pick up the hammer with his/her left hand, gripping it between the first and second joint of the fingers. The right hand should be placed on top of the left hand with the thumbs pointing up.

### Step 2: Winding and releasing the hammer

The hammer throw can be hard for kids to learn when coaches make it more complex than it needs to be. But when a coach *keeps it simple*, learning to throw will more fun for the athlete and easier for the coach.

To wind the hammer, the athlete should face away from the landing area and swing the hammer around the head counterclockwise as shown in the diagram below. There are a few concepts the coach should remind the athlete of: (1) keep the arms and body relaxed and (2) bend the arms while the hammer goes

behind the head, but always keep them straight and long while in front of the body. Have the athlete take two winds and then release the hammer over the shoulder into the field behind him. When releasing, make sure the feet stay on the ground while the athlete simply lets go of the hammer at the appropriate time.

## HOW TO EXECUTE THE WIND

An athlete should take multiple throws without turning and the coach can begin to tinker with his technique on each attempt. The first concept an athlete should learn is when to “push” or “accelerate” the hammer. During each wind, the athlete should add a little speed to the hammer before it gets in front of the athlete. The athlete should actively accelerate the hammer from the end of the second wind until the hammer is directly in front of the athlete. Once the hammer is directly in front of the athlete, it is too late to accelerate. The athlete should also make sure the hammer stays in front of the body and the athlete is not “dragging” the hammer behind him.

The other elements of the throw (a proper orbit, etc.) will begin to fall into place with lots of repetitions; the coach should not address these elements at this time since it will likely only overwhelm the athlete.

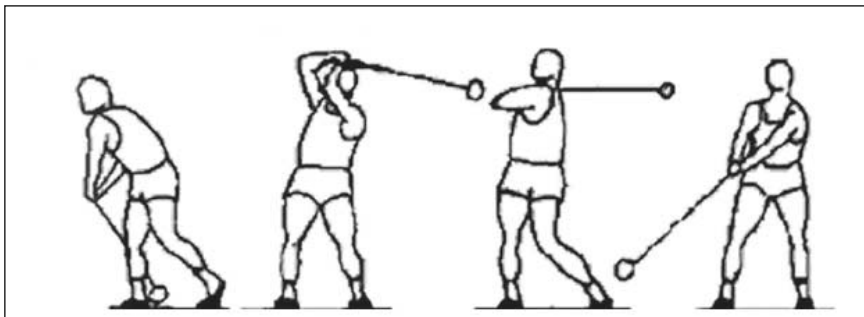
### Step 3: Wind, turn and release

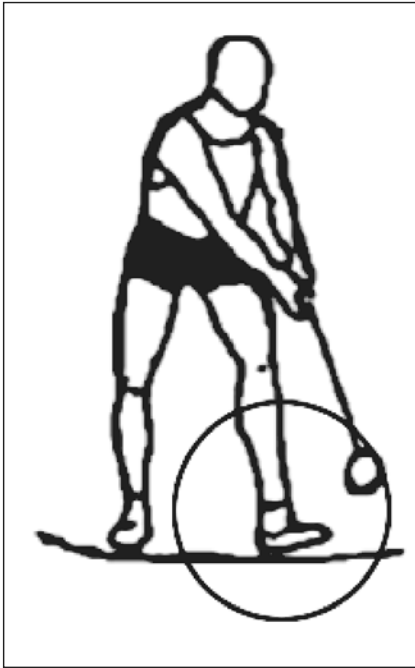
Soon the athlete will become very comfortable with winding and releasing. It may take less than one practice session for some athletes, or multiple sessions for other athletes. The coach must determine when the athlete is ready to move on to the next step.

Before the athlete begins to turn, he should take a few more winds and releases where he dorsiflexes the left ankle prior to the release. The athlete should begin to turn on the left heel as the hammer comes around in front of him. However, the athlete will release the hammer without a turn as he has been doing. The simple act of dorsiflexing the foot will get him used to transferring his balance to the heel.

When an athlete begins to do a real turn, the coach should focus on the athlete’s upper body. Focusing on the footwork can easily confuse most kids and promote poor technique. Have the athlete do his/her winds as normal, with a focus on accelerating the hammer at the proper times. On the second wind, the athlete will accelerate the hammer around to the left and *let the hammer turn the athlete*. If the athlete has flexed the foot properly, he will turn around with the hammer. Athletes must pick up their right foot after a quarter turn. Midway through the turn the athlete simply puts his foot down to complete the turn. These points will come almost naturally if the athlete focuses more on accelerating the hammer and allowing the hammer to turn him rather than turning the hammer. The body will find these positions on its *own*; the coach does not need to address these while coaching.

The athlete’s first throw should just be with one turn so that he can become comfortable with turning. After the thrower becomes com-





Dorsiflexing the left foot

fortable with one turn, he should progress to three turns. Most elite throwers use three or four turns, so reaching this stage quickly will help one's development.

As they progress, the coach should continue to tinker with their technique and work out any errors. In the next part of this series, we will discuss how coaches can address some common technical errors in beginners.

#### Step 4: Have fun

The most important thing is for the athlete to have fun. First impressions are important. If an athlete is going to succeed in this event, it needs to be fun for them. There are many approaches out there that teach the hammer throw through more steps, but our approach allows kids to throw almost immediately,

making it fun and leaving a lasting impression that will encourage them to try the event again.

## COMMON ERRORS

- Lifting right leg too early—Focus on not picking up the leg.
- Discus leg
- Die at 0°—Get more momentum. Don't let it die in the winds.

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## IS COACHING AN ART OR SCIENCE?



The longer we stay in the coaching profession we realize that coaching is becoming more and more a science. Some knowledge is needed of physical components. Training principles, applying psychological principles, nutrition and an understanding of biomechanics are required to help the athlete reach his/her potential. Knowledge of science alone, however, will not get the job done. It still requires the communication skill called The Art of Coaching in which the coach is able to plan and communicate to the athlete what he or she has learned from the exercise physiologist, sports nutritionists and sports

medicine. Coaching is becoming more complex, but the coach remains the central figure in the development of the athlete. The coach is like an artist, with eyes that watch the picture being developed and the skill to touch up the rough spots to create the finished product.

Bob Fraley, former Fresno State coach

Adapted from *The Pole Vault Standard*, Vol. 15, Issue 4