

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Indoor Parkour Training

Jesse Woody



When I last left you (*CrossFit Journal*, [Issue 51](#)), I had gathered all of the foundation movements into a [compendium](#), outlining some of the most common errors and some effective training to overcome those stumbling blocks. That was all well and good during the warmer months, but now it's February, and the cold, ice, wind, and/or the lack of useful daylight are all conspiring to inhibit regular Parkour training. Training in a variety of environmental elements is good practice, but it's unreasonable to think that a practitioner who is shaky on the basics in perfect conditions might be willing to train the basics in inclement weather. However, without frequent exposure to the movements, the technique that seemed easy in the fall might be harder when you pick it up again come spring. This month, then, I'll talk about some common uses of gymnastics equipment for indoor training that will allow you and those you coach to continue to train technique.

If you have a gymnastics training facility in your area, you're in luck. Though these gyms pay their rent from relatively expensive gymnastics training, they quite often have an hour or two, one or two nights a week, reserved for open gym, where anybody can pay a small flat rate and play for a while. Before we opened our facility, Primal Fitness in Washington, D.C., this was the most common place to find a large group of traceurs in the winter months after an all-day training session. With large open space and plentiful padding, you can work a variety of movements that you might otherwise find impossible to build up the courage for outside. Over the years, we have devised a number of methods for converting common gymnastics apparatus into Parkour-specific training tools. This allows productive Parkour training on objects not originally intended for such a purpose.

1 of 4

Indoor Parkour Training (continued...)



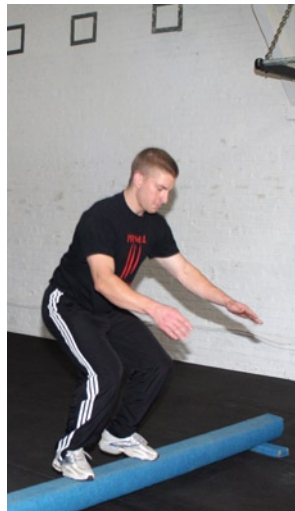
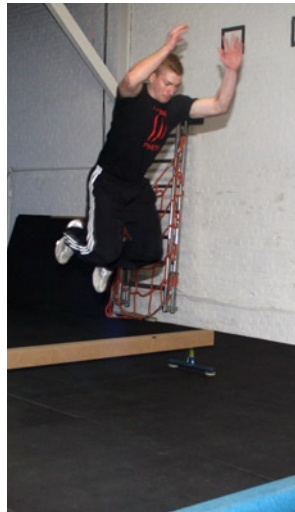
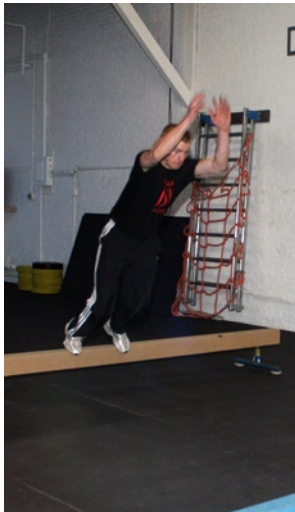
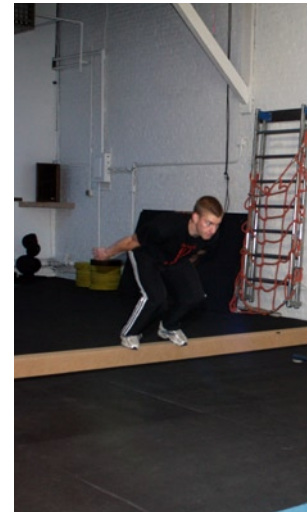
The most obvious setup would be the vaulting horse or padding stacks for vault training. Simple and effective, these two arrangements are adjustable for a variety of possible combinations. They also offer the benefit of being more forgiving during early training, as their surfaces are much softer than the common concrete wall. An important aspect to consider is the stability of the objects on whatever surface you choose, as an unchecked pad stack that topples mid-vault can lead to some pretty severe injuries. Though the trapezoidal pads shown in the images are excellent, they are in no way necessary, as any decent-sized stack of folding pads can be used to great effect. Possible combinations would be long monkey vaults between two stacks, vaults over gaps between two stacks, or vaults to precisions where the height of one or both obstacles can be adjusted to a number of different levels.

Another multipurpose piece of equipment is the balance beam. Vaults and precisions are easily worked on this apparatus, although the no-shoes policy of most gymnastics facilities can teach painful lessons on proper landing technique. This is hardly a downside, as barefoot training highlights the weaknesses in a foundational movement before they can become hazardous over the long haul. Most gymnastics facilities have beams in a variety of heights, ranging from floor-level folding “balance pads” that eliminate nearly all risk to competition-height beams that require confidence and precision in technique. Through the progression from one end of the spectrum to the other, you will realize profound benefits in balance, coordination, agility, accuracy, power, and confidence that make this essential training for any dedicated athlete.

A slightly less obvious use of common apparatus is the adaptation of the uneven or parallel bars for training the underbar. You can vary the height of the railings, and a stack of folding pads under the chosen horizontal beam gives an easily-measurable goal for the movement that reduces the risk of bad technique immensely. Another option would be to use athletic or duct-tape to fashion a horizontal “railing” in the manner of the “underduct” training method I described in the underbar article (*CFJ* issue 50). This creates a highly forgivable “bar” for training that breaks free before it can cause injury. If you use parallel bars for working on your underbar technique, it is usually best to completely remove one of the bars before you begin. If you choose to do so, make sure it’s within the rules of the facility, and make sure to turn the remaining railing toward the inside of the base to increase stability as much as possible.

The hardest movement to train in a gym setting is the cat leap, as any arrangement of stacked padding is too unstable to be of much use. The best option that we’ve found is the combination of a large crash mat, some folding pads, and the parallel bars. The large crash mat is wedged between the parallel bar, which is placed as close to the wall as possible. Behind this you will wedge the folding pads to fill the gap caused by the parallel bar base to create a solid vertical surface for landing. It is also a good idea to pad the base of the parallel bars as any misstep could lead to a bad landing on heavy steel plates. This setup offers the ability to train the basic movement pattern, though the railing makes the landing and top-out slightly easier. What’s really fun about this setup is the ability to launch from distances impossible in the outdoors to catch a dynamic cat leap and instantly pop up and over the railing into another movement.

Indoor Parkour Training (continued...)



3 of 4

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Indoor Parkour Training (continued...)



The trick is not to let this apparent super-human ability carry over into your urban training without a proper ramp-up to the less forgiving hard surfaces that you will most often encounter.

Once you grasp the basics of improvising equipment in this setting, you can begin to change the layout of the apparatus to suit your needs. Some of the best conditioning you will ever experience will feature intervals of any given time in an obstacle course setting, where you will attempt to move smoothly and quickly from one object to the next without any pause. In time, your movements will become smoother and more efficient to deal with the added physical duress that you will be experiencing. Start slowly to assure safety, as shaky technique can quickly turn dangerous when you are fatigued. This is the benefit of this setting, though, as the padded surfaces offer a lenience that brick and concrete never do.

With these few tips under your belt, you should be able to make use of the open gym periods of any gymnastics facility to your advantage, ensuring consistent technique training over the cold and dreary months to come. Next month I'll show you the implements we've developed here at Primal Fitness to take indoor Parkour training to the next level, making it possible to include Parkour training in your facility cheaply and effectively.

Jesse Woody, age 26, father of two, has about eight years experience in fitness and nutrition. He works in various capacities for the Woodberry Forest School in Virginia, including working with the outdoor education department and, currently, transitioning to head strength and conditioning coach. He's been practicing parkour for three years, though he's acted like a monkey his entire life. He is an administrator and frequent content contributor for the [American Parkour website](#).