

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Backward Roll Drills

Roger Harrell

### Initial Drill: "Pizza Rocks"

Hold your hands, palms up, out to your sides at shoulder height, as if you're holding a pizza in each. Your fingertips should be pointed back and elbows pointed forward. Sit and roll back, keeping your eyes on your toes, to candlestick and "squash the pizzas" on the floor

behind you. While pressing your palms into the floor by your ears, roll forward to stand. As you get more comfortable with the drill, you can push and begin to lift yourself a little off the floor.



1 of 4

## Backward Roll Drills (continued...)

### Tucked Backward Roll

Start this skill standing stretched with arms straight up overhead, not allowing them to drop forward. Then sit and lift your feet to roll onto your back. As you rock onto your shoulders, “squash the pizzas.” Keep driving your toes over your head in the direction you are rolling. Push on the floor with your hands as you roll over and stand up. Drive the roll by lifting your toes over your

head, not by throwing your head or shoulders back. Keep your feet and knees together, and keep watching your toes throughout the motion. Do not allow your knees to land on the ground as you roll over.

Tucked Backward Roll



### Tucked Backward Roll with Lift

Perform a backward roll, but as your hands contact the floor, push aggressively to lift yourself well off the ground as you roll over. Maintain the tuck and continue to drive your toes over the roll.

head lift. Maintain a hollow body position, lead the skill with your toes, and keep watching your toes. Ideally, you will arrive in the handstand still looking at your toes. You can build more initial momentum by keeping pressure with your legs and pushing back aggressively just before you contact the floor with your butt. Keep your torso upright as you sit back; do not lean forward.

Bent-Arm Back Extension Roll



### Bent-Arm Back Extension Roll

Perform a backward roll but as you roll onto your shoulders, shoot your feet toward the ceiling and push into a handstand. Do not throw your hips up or let your



## Backward Roll Drills (continued...)

### Straight-Arm Back Extension Roll

Positions are critical for a successful straight-arm back extension roll. If the bent-arm back extension roll is practiced properly, the “sit and roll back” phase should be dynamic. Start this skill standing with your arms up by your ears, palms turned away from your body and thumbs facing forward. Sit back into the roll trying to build as much momentum as possible. Maintaining a tight line and keeping your hips turned under is crucial for maximizing momentum. As you roll back, reach back to the ground. You want your hands to contact and begin

pushing as soon as possible, but do not throw your arms, head, and/or shoulders back. As your feet leave the ground, drive them aggressively upward as you push back on your hands. Keep your body tight and hollow, look at your toes, and ride into the handstand. You will need to fight to keep your arms straight.

#### Straight-Arm Back Extension Roll



### Drills for Straight-Arm Back Extension Roll

1. Work the straight-arm back extension roll by first locking your fingers together. This forces your arms to turn out and positions your hands properly.
2. Perform a straight-arm backward roll and end up in a hollow prone support.
3. Perform a straight-arm back extension roll, but instead of completing the handstand, aim short of the handstand and immediately roll forward to stand. A hollow, tight body should be maintained throughout this drill.
2. Piked backward roll: Begin by standing with legs together and then sit back piked (i.e., bent at the hips), reaching for the floor. Drive your toes over the roll without bending your legs to stand.
3. Consecutive explosive rolls: Perform tucked backward rolls in series. Attempt to push off the floor so that when your feet contact the floor at the end of the roll they are already well in front of you, driving you into the next roll. The goal should be to pop up higher and rotate farther on each consecutive roll.

### Backward Roll Variants

1. Straddled backward roll: Begin by standing in a straddle. Sit back and reach for the floor between your legs. Roll backward, maintaining the straddle to a straddle stand. Do not bend your legs.

## Backward Roll Drills (continued...)

### Backward Roll Common Mistakes

1. Throwing head and shoulders back to drive the roll. The roll should be driven by lifting your feet and legs.
2. Not enough push with the hands. A weak push will make the roll uncomfortable as it will allow a lot of weight to be placed on the head.

### Possible Assists

1. Do consecutive backward rolls down an incline mat or grassy hill for gravity assist.
2. As the roll progresses, a spotter can place one hand just above each hip to lift and push the student over in the roll.

Backward Roll  
Assists



Roger Harrell is a former competitive gymnast with twenty years of experience in the sport. He has continued to train in the sport well beyond his competitive years. He has run several competitive gymnastics training programs and currently focuses on coaching adults and bringing the benefits of gymnastics to those outside the usual community. He is the developer, designer, and webmaster of [www.DrillsAndSkills.com](http://www.DrillsAndSkills.com).

