

# the **CrossFit**

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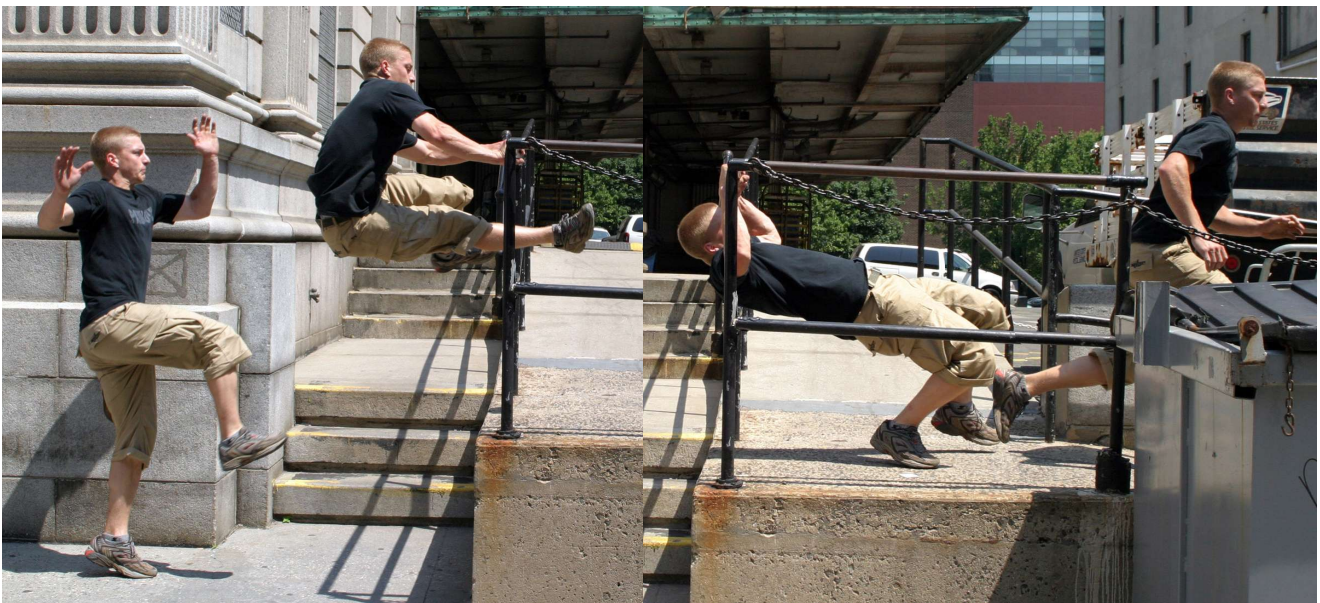
## JOURNAL ARTICLES

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### **Parkour Basics**

#### **Part 6: Underbar and Gate Vault**

Jesse Woody



With these last two moves, my series of articles on parkour basics is in its final stretch. From this point out, I will focus on showing some manageable progressions for scaling these movements for the general population and showing how to incorporate many of these principles in your everyday training. While I've tried to group the previous movements into some semblance of order by similarity, these last two features are the leftovers, differing from each other in all but the fact that they are performed by the same human body. That being said, they can be two of the most fun and useful movements that you can learn. So without further ado, I present to you the underbar and gate vault.

#### **Underbar**

The underbar is quite simply an extension of a simple swing. Where this movement differs from the general swing that you might perform on a high bar is the fact that you will use your core strength and the speed of your approach to focus this swinging movement horizontally through a restricted area. This can be useful in situations such as quickly navigating the space between two railings or when you take to moving through the trees, monkey style.

For training purposes, you'll want to choose a round metal railing that is high enough to afford you a decent jump into the technique while not being too tall for comfort. Once

## Parkour Basics - Part 6: Underbar and Gate Vault *(continued)*

you've chosen your object for training, approach it at a steady run with even strides. Once you get within 3 to 5 feet of the obstacle, jump and begin to tuck your knees up toward your chest. At the same time, lean backward slightly, putting your torso at an angle and allowing your feet to travel in front of your body. As you reach the gap you wish to swing through, extend your legs through the space, allowing your legs to travel through in a horizontal trajectory. The point at which you grab the railing can vary a bit, but it's easiest to think of it happening around the time your hips pass the plane of the object. As you grab the bar or branch, pull your shoulder blades together and apply tension to keep your arms from straightening out as your hips begin to unpike. At the same time, forcefully extend your hips, which will work against the eccentric tension of your arms to create an arcing trajectory for your legs and allow you to swing up and out away from the object. Once your hips and lower back have cleared the bottom rail, you will allow your arms to straighten out and let your swing carry you the rest of the way through the object to land on the other side in a crouch or roll.



Besides the obvious benefits of increased upper-body strength and the ability to escape where very few bad guys could ever think to follow, this movement develops a useful amount of confidence. If you can approach the obstacle with a powerful stride and commit to a jump that will put your feet in front of your torso, you will be amazed at the obstacles you can make your way through. If, on the other hand, you allow your mind to override what your body is capable of, you will be wishing that your shins hadn't been the first thing to contact that railing. In this instance, the difference between absolute commitment and that twinge of hesitation is obvious, and a more objective measure of ability in parkour cannot be found. If you find yourself on the other side of a small gap between railings, landing smoothly and continuing on your way, then you've grasped the technique for that obstacle. Otherwise, you are banging your knees, head, butt, or all of the above on your way through, only to wish that you'd stuck with the original game plan of absolute confidence.

But there is a better way! When American Parkour created

our [website](#), we put a Colorado traceur who goes by the Internet pseudonym "Demon" in charge of writing a monthly training tip. We knew that this kid had skill in action, but developing innovative training ideas is another thing entirely, so we weren't quite sure what to expect. Luckily, his first installment was a perfect blend of sound advice and "why didn't I think of that" logic. The method he created for training underbars he called "Underduct," and it utilizes two common objects in the modern American landscape: unused playground pull-up bars and duct tape. Once you find a suitable group of pull-up bars (monkey bars work well too) you will attach a piece of duct-tape from one upright to the other, as a kinder, gentler substitute for the lower bar in an ordinary railing, at a height that allows you to train whichever width underbar might be troubling you without any risk of impact if you come up short.

As scary as the build-up to a good underbar can be, it's a very fun movement with a good bit of functional carryover to other sports and movements. It requires considerable strength and power both in your upper body during the catch and in your core and hips for retaining position while horizontally extending the hip to maximize distance in the follow-through of the swing. There are also many of variations on the technique that will keep you excited about the possibilities of movement for years. Just keep your eyes open for the potential underbars in various random obstacles, from tree branches to railings to car windows.

### Gate vault

The gate vault is part of the parkour repertoire almost entirely because of its use on tallish chainlink fences, which can be difficult to overcome quickly in any other manner. The strength of this technique is that it doesn't necessarily rely on the purchase of your feet on the vertical face of the object; rather, you use the placement and powerful extension of your hips to propel you over the obstacle and safely to the other side.

The best object to start training the gate vault on is a railing



## Parkour Basics - Part 6: Underbar and Gate Vault *(continued)*

around waist high, where the ground is level on both sides. Stand facing the railing with your hands on top, then bend at the waist, retaining your grip on the top of the railing with one hand while planting the other on the ground at the base. Determining which hand is which is as easy as performing a couple of cartwheels; the hand you feel most comfortable leading with in the cartwheel will most likely be the hand you reach below and plant with. Once you plant your lower hand, you can proceed in one of two ways. The first option is to extend your hips forcefully, raising your legs overhead, and as you do so, begin to rotate around the planted hand to face the obstacle on the way down. This prevents the movement from becoming a weird front handspring at height, which always seems extremely sketchy to me, as it puts you in quite a disadvantaged position. That said, quite a few people make good use of this front handspring movement, where you extend your hips but avoid the rotation, thus landing facing forward after the movement. Training both techniques can increase your special awareness, which is always worthwhile. Once you find the variation that works best for you, stick to it and drill it to perfection.

Once you get comfortable performing the movement on level ground, you can begin to look for obstacles with the railing still at waist height but a small drop on the opposite side.

This will allow you to gradually dial in the technique so you can control the rotation appropriately to land securely on your feet. Once this becomes second nature, it's time to move to the intended obstacle for this movement, which would be a taller object with slightly unstable vertical surfaces that reduce the efficacy of a wall run (discussed in an earlier article [issue 48]).

To work up to that, find an appropriate object around head height. The top surface should be narrow and without any protruding edges that will injure your hips when you fold over the top. To begin, stand an appropriate distance from the object and grab the top with your hands. Bend at the knees and hips, and then jump while pulling down and toward your hips. Once the top of the object reaches hip level, you will bend at the waist, retaining your grip on the top of the obstacle with one hand while reaching down, below head level for purchase with the other hand, on the opposite side. On a chain-link fence, this lower hand will grab into the links, whereas other obstacles might take some practice to find a secure purchase. Once your hands are in their appropriate positions you will extend at the hips, straightening your legs up over the object while pivoting on the lower hand. Once you reach vertical, you will begin to rotate at the hips and let go of your top handhold. Spot your landing, extend your legs



**Jesse Woody**, age 26, father of two, has about eight years experience in fitness and nutrition (though a lot of that was time wasted on bodybuilding). 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 (and CrossFit for a little over one), though he's acted like a monkey his entire life. He is an administrator and frequent content contributor for the [American Parkour website](#).

