

# the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Wrestling Set-Ups, Takedowns, and Finishes

Chris Spealler

In last month's article I talked about the very basics of wrestling—the stance, penetration step, and some fundamental movements and defense. Now that you are armed with some kind of knowledge on how to set out on the path to wrestling stardom, we ought to explore some options in offense. This month we will talk about set-ups, double-leg and single-leg takedowns, and some finishes. Once we get in on a shot we need a way to get our opponent to the mat. This comes in the form of a finish and there are all different kinds. This month we will be keeping things simple and only going over a few, but the important thing to keep in mind is that the more options you have with finishes (or completing the takedown) the better off you will be against an experienced opponent.

As I mentioned last month, I think the best defense is effective and calculated offense. In order to score a takedown, you have to take calculated risks. There are tons of different moves out there to use as attacks and means of getting your opponent to the mat, but even the best wrestlers in the world often stick with the very basics—for example, the double- and single-leg. What the experienced wrestler does differently comes in the set-ups that precede the takedown itself, as well as in his or her ability to do what we call chain wrestling. (Those of you familiar with jiu-jitsu will recognize some similarities here.) The more you can flow from one move or attack to another, the more effective you will be in scoring. The opponent will always try to defend himself from takedowns, so in order to score, you need to know how to counter those defenses with other attacks, which is the essence of chain wrestling: going

smoothly from one move to another, to another, and so on.

### Set-ups

So let's get into set-ups, which come out of the handfighting that typically begins a match. A set-up is when I am trying to get my opponent out of position and make him vulnerable to my attack. This is the very first part of our takedown and you will see beginner wrestlers making the mistake of not using set-ups. Against experienced wrestlers it is important to get them off balance or out of position during our handfighting so that we can use set-ups to get past their lines of defense and into a successful shot. Last month's article included a video clip of some handfighting done with the goal of both wrestlers trying to create angles and get one another out of position. The most basic set-ups are posts, chops, and head clubs. In order for to take a shot on an opponent, you should typically be about arm's length away. If you are any farther, it is difficult to close the gap without being countered before you get there.

A post comes from an opponent making contact with you, usually in the form of a hand on the shoulder or head. This happens all the time in handfighting and is the reason it is so important to always stay moving and never remain in one position for too long. If you do, you are vulnerable to a post or chop. The post is simply a short movement of your hand and arm that forces your opponent's arm upward. Regardless of whether it is on your head or your shoulder, you should wait until you feel a bit of pressure, which means the opponent is

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leaning into you. Then, when you “post,” or push your opponent’s arm up quickly, he has a tendency to fall a bit forward, leaving his lower body more exposed for an attack.

The “chop” is used in the same way and is very effective when your opponent is posting on your shoulders or chest. This is when you use that same short and aggressive movement with the arm, but now it is to push the opponent’s arm down instead of up. This has the same effect as the post: when you opponent is leaning in on you, a chop gets him off balance. It is a bit more difficult to use a chop to expose the opponent’s lower body, since his arms are going down toward his legs instead of up, but it is still very effective as a set-up.

The last of the basic set-ups is the head club. When your head is pulled down, it is a natural reaction for any wrestler, beginner or advanced, to want to pull it back up. If your head is forced down, you can’t see what’s in front of you, and you’re in a terrible position because now you have lost one of your first lines of defense, the head. When an opponent’s head is pulled down the body usually follows as well which means their arms are not as effective in blocking an attack. It also forces our opponent off balance, which makes them even more vulnerable to an attack. A head club is when you use your forearm to club the back of your opponent’s head down toward the mat. (It’s not, by the way, a great idea to use your fist for this, as the referee may see it as punching and could award your opponent a penalty point.) Using your forearm is very effective, as it is quite unpleasant for the opponent if done aggressively. The idea is to club your opponent’s head down toward the mat, getting him off balance and out of position again, and then to allow him to pull his head back up. Typically, people pull up too hard and end up standing straight after the head club, which leaves them without much of a line of defense and set up for a takedown.

### Takedowns

Now that we’ve gone over our set-ups, let’s move on to the double-leg takedown. The double-leg is so effective because it can be done with your opponent standing in virtually any kind of stance: left-leg lead, right-leg lead, or square stance. There are a variety of ways to do a double-leg, but I am going to stick to explaining just one technique here. After the set-up (post, chop, or head club), go into your penetration step, lowering your

level first and dropping your front knee between your opponent’s feet (as discussed in last month’s article). Your head and chest should stay tall and close to your opponents body to prepare for the possibility that your opponent will counter with a sprawl. Your arms will be forward, reaching in for the legs of your opponent, but your elbows should be in. If you leave your elbows out, there are some nasty counters that your opponent can use on you.

As you drop your front knee, reach both hands around the

opponent’s legs and wrap low around the ankles. This is to prevent him from being able to sprawl effectively. Now, bring your trailing leg up and plant it next to your opponent’s foot, with your chest and head still high. Do not stay on your knees here. As you rise up out of the lunge position, use your head and chest to put pressure on the upper body of your opponent and think of running across the mat with tiny steps. Instead of driving straight forward, you want to change direction on your opponent by driving him across the mat. As you drive into him and he leaves the ground, pull his legs up a bit and make sure you land with your hips square to the mat. If you land on one hip, on your side, it is difficult to keep your opponent on the mat.

Again, there are tons of different single-leg takedown options, but I am going to stick with the basic head-outside single here. The setup is the same, but you will most likely find that the “post” works particularly well with this takedown. Unlike the double-leg, where the opponent’s stance doesn’t really matter, now it’s a big

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## Wrestling Set-Ups, Takedowns, and Finishes (continued...)



*"Posting" while lowering your level.*



*Wrapping the hands low on a double-leg.*



*Driving across on the double-leg.*



*Head-outside single.*



*Finishing a head-outside single with a "lift."*



*Finishing a head-outside single with "running the pipe."*

factor. If you're going to shoot a head-outside single with a right-leg lead, your opponent has to have one too. If he has a left-leg lead, it's not going to work out so well for you. Your initial movements all stay the same as in the double-leg—lowering your level and dropping your lead knee in between your opponent's legs. The difference now is that you reach with your right arm to his right leg (or lead leg). You still wrap your arm low and around the ankle here. Then, as your trailing leg comes up to plant, bring your left arm low around the same leg that your right hand is on. Change directions and drive across the mat, as you did in the double-leg. As you begin to push across the mat, your left hand stays on

the opponent's right leg and you change off to a double with your right hand, reaching for the left knee or leg to try to take out his only post. Now finish in the same way you do with the double-leg with a powerful drive and taking out their left leg that is posting on the mat. Don't forget to land with those hips square to the mat again and ready to climb up the body to keep pressure on your opponent so they stay on the mat.

### Finishes

Finishes are all the different ways that we can complete our takedowns. Your finish on the double-leg was driving across the body and taking out your opponent's

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far leg. On the single-leg it was changing to the double-leg. Finishes are so important because if we can get in on a shot effectively, but we can't complete it by taking our opponent to the mat then we won't score our points for a takedown. The finish is the completion of our takedown and is one of the most important steps because that is where we will be rewarded 2 points and then be able to work for a "turn" on top in order to gain a larger lead by scoring again.

As nice and neat as all this sounds in theory, it's not always going to end up like this in reality. There are a number of different finishes shown in the videos in this article. It is vital that you know different finishes is so that, when your opponent counters you, you have somewhere else to go. In many cases, you will find wrestlers getting in on a good shot but getting defended in their initial finish and needing to have a second option. Once you have a good hold on your opponent's leg, you don't want to let go of it and lose all the work you've done. So, on a double-leg you may see someone change off to a single-leg, or maybe even do some kind of lift to get the opponent off the ground. In our video of the single-leg, you will see the change to a double, pressuring the leg to get the opponent more off-balance, a variety of other tactics. The important thing is that you learn how to flow from one finish to another so that you have options to go to if you are defended. Two experienced wrestlers can battle it out with one counter after another.

Limiting yourself to one specific way of attacking is a good way to reduce your effectiveness and make it more difficult on yourself when you run into counters and defenses. And just like anything else, ridiculous amounts of repetition in drilling moves will lead you to a place where you can just react and not have to think. That is exactly where you want to get to become the best wrestler you can be.



### Wrestling Set-Ups



### Wrestling Takedowns



### Wrestling Finishes



### Wrestling Drills



Chris Spealler, a.k.a. "Speal" runs [CrossFit Park City](#) in Park City, Utah. He was a Division I college wrestler at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. Graduating in 2002, he finished two matches away from becoming an All-American at nationals. Speal now enjoys feeding the competition bug with CrossFit and training with one of his wrestling team members, Eric O'Connor ("Eric O") on the side.