
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

The Gymnastics Solution

Dusty Hyland and Jeff Tucker offer some advice to CrossFitters aspiring to learn new gymnastics movements.

By Thomas (Dusty) Hyland with Jeff Tucker

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All images courtesy of Jeff Tucker

The CrossFit Journal will be presenting a series of articles where Jeff Tucker teaches several gymnastics movements and explains the strength prerequisites for those movements.

In this introduction, Dusty Hyland and Tucker talk about why it's important to build up slowly when learning new gymnastics movements that can place new stress on the body.

1 of 5



The V-sit will challenge your body in new ways, and a certain level of strength is required for proficiency.

Patience, Patience

I started a gymnastics-for-CrossFit class a year and a half ago at CrossFit Culver City, and now we host it Thursday nights at DogTown CrossFit in Culver City. I now also work with Coach Jeff Tucker in CrossFit Gymnastic Seminars.

What was and still is shocking is the lack of prerequisite strength in most everyone who comes to class. I just didn't realize how glaringly horrific that lack of upper-body strength was. For instance, I have "elite-level" Crossfitters who come to class for the first time and struggle with 5 ring dips. However, the people who have stuck with the classes and learned from the gymnastics courses have progressed very well.

Right now, the muscle-up is the benchmark in CrossFit land as to whether you are an elite athlete or not—more or less, and this is certainly debatable. Well, there are certain levels in life and in training that—if skipped—will come back to bite you in the ass. There is a reason why gymnasts are so good at body-weight-exercise workouts. It's the same reason wrestlers are amazing and have a leg up in the met-con arena and in general mental toughness: years of training.

Wait—did you hear me? I said years of elite, intense training.

Can you learn the movement of a muscle-up? Can you understand the mechanics and make it repeatable? Absolutely. However, it's going to take a level of work and commitment that you may or may not have as of yet. No weekend seminar or course is going to prepare you for the rigors that befall the shoulder girdle, the wrists and the rest of the body in learning the muscle-up. Injuries and wear and tear might and will plague you. I'm not saying it's impossible; it's just really, really hard.

There is a reason why there are not a lot of adult elite-level gymnasts. They burn out, quit and learn to hate it, and most likely get hurt. What's awesome is that CrossFitters seem up to the task. As we move forward, I just want people to respect skill progression while developing the strength for any move they wish to set as a goal. I want them to slow down, think about what the next logical step is in their training and listen to their coaches and—more importantly—their bodies.

“I just want people to respect skill progression while developing the strength for any move they wish to set as a goal.”

—Dusty Hyland

Sounds simple right? Not so much all the time.

I am hearing about injuries all over the place due to folks seeing a movement and attempting to perform it without having the goods when it comes to hitting such strength moves. We are not in the business of hurting people. Tucker regularly states, “Learn the movement but have the pre-req strength for the movements attempted.”

As CrossFit explodes, let us as trainers and educators toe that technique line. Hey, folks, lets just try and keep the stupidity in check. Remember: just because it looks cool doesn't mean you should be up on the rings doing it quite yet until you understand the movement and the strength requirements. You don't just get up and do the movements; you work toward them and accomplish them with ever-persistent work in placement of limbs, core strength and spatial awareness.

I am excited at the possibilities CrossFit training has afforded the gymnastics community and ever-thankful I can be a part of a group that can help people rediscover fitness and stretch their limits within CrossFit. We have an opportunity to redefine health and fitness for a new generation and expose its members to gymnastics forms. However, let's not forget the thousand steps it takes to learn a new skill, let alone the steps needed to take a skill from a static plane to a dynamic one like the rings. To quote John Wooden, one of the greatest coaches of all time, “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.”



Each movement has progressions that will ensure safety and success. Learn them to optimize your performance.



The L-sit becomes quite a bit harder when you move to the rings.



Learning from elite coaches and athletes is the best way to master challenging new movements.

Epilogue by Jeff Tucker

I appreciate and agree with every word Coach Dusty has written in this article and shared with you. We often discuss the importance of goal setting and planning to achieve those goals. My biggest issue in the community we have is when someone sees a new, shiny thing and instantly gravitates toward it with reckless abandon.

Let me make it simple for you all with an example of a video put out there recently. In the video, an athlete was used to show back tucks with a comparison to hang-power-clean strength. It's a good, fun video and a great way of extrapolating the power-clean move in comparison to the vertical jump and set used in a back tuck. But just because you have a big power clean does not mean you can do a back tuck in 13 minutes.

Yes, it is an awesome and fun video to watch, and yes, we enjoy seeing fun flips in the air, but what is the rush? Does coaching now need to be for time?

**“Does coaching now
need to be for time?”**

—Jeff Tucker

Let's be real here: spatial awareness is a huge factor in back tucks. So too is body awareness, as forms in tumbling can go awry very quickly. All the hang-power-clean strength in the world won't stop gravity if you decide to open your body too early, or if you panic and land on your neck, which can cause serious injury.

This is my biggest fear, and it played out when a young Aussie trainer recently looked at the video online and attempted the movement only to break two cervical vertebrae. He had no coaching, no training and certainly no game plan. He just thought life was all good because he could power clean more than the guy demoing the video. Not true, and shame on him. (He is healing nicely, by the way.)

My biggest hope for anyone wanting to learn a skill is that he or she understands that sometimes faster is not always better. Strength will serve you well when attempting, as will knowing how to use those strong CrossFit muscles as you teach them the muscle memory for the movements you set as goals. Most of what we perform and teach is disadvantaged leverage, and at times it's extremely hard on connective tissues. Take care to not overload them too soon. The biggest mistake I've seen in our community is overtraining a move after learning it.

"Overtraining is under-recovery," according to Mike Burgener, so try and use some common sense there as well.

Set some goals, get some training and learn these body movements.



About the Authors



Courtesy of Dusty Hyland

Dusty Hyland is the co-owner of DogTown CrossFit in Culver City, Calif. By the age of seven, he had started an active athletic regimen that has continued throughout his life. At 13, Dusty gave up a host of other sports to focus on gymnastics. He was a very successful gymnast, and after his father's job promotion and relocation to Northern California, he began to train at Stanford University under two-time

world champion Tong Fei. By 16, he competed at the Junior Olympic National Championships and trained with the U.S. Olympic Team. In college, he competed in NCAA Division 1 men's gymnastics and scored a NCAA record perfect 10 on the still rings. After one more year of competition, he retired due to injury. He then traveled the world starring in a Cirque du Soleil-type live show before settling in Los Angeles and doing some stunt work in films.

He has CrossFit Level 1, Gymnastics and Mobility certificates, and he is an NASM CPT and a USA Gymnastics Coach.

Jeff R. Tucker, or "Tucker" to those who know him, is the CEO and founder of Global Sports Xtreme (GSX) in Fort Worth, Texas, and he has a passion for teaching gymnastics. At CrossFit Gymnastics Seminars, he and his staff delve into basic and intermediate gymnastics forms in a lecture setting followed by practical application. Skills are repeated until the student has a satisfactory understanding of how to learn, spot and



Jeff Gill

teach such methods safely. Students are also taught how to scale the movements until they become second nature. Tucker's goal in this course is to aid CrossFitters in using gymnastics for strength development, core control and WOD progressions. Result: the CrossFit community will become more engaged in using one of the foundational blocks for CrossFit workouts—gymnastics.