

ICS Advantage: Mill Pivot-Switch

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[Note: This article is rewritten from the original published in 2005, and all pictures and video clips are unchanged. Though I have improved since then, the examples included here are sufficient for the purposes of this article. Click the embedded links to view the demonstration video clips.]

International Clubbell Sport is a growing sport for strength endurance athletes all over the world. Preparing for an ICS competition is a great way to go deeper into your training and improve your practice. In ICS, competitors perform one exercise for 10 minutes, rest for 30 to 60 minutes, then perform the other exercise for 10 minutes. When a single rep can spell the difference in contest results, maximizing your reps becomes critical. There are lots of ways to switch the Clubbell® from one hand to the other during the Mills portion of the event, and each has its strengths and weaknesses. The basic switch is safe and easy, but it requires sacrificing a partial rep and uses critical seconds each time. To eliminate the loss of these partial reps, I looked for a new way to make the transition.

The Mill

The Mill has two components: the Inward Pendulum and the Shield Cast. These two movements combine to become the basic Performance Mill. A Performance Mill alternates the two and smoothes out the transition from one to the other. Watch the arc of the end of the Clubbell and see how large the movement is. Performance Breathing for each movement is very important, and with practice can be merged into one breath pattern.

Performance Mill: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjhwGJsqzhA>

Once the Performance Mill is grooved, it's time to sophisticate the movement. The Technical Mill requires greater technical mastery and is not recommended for beginners. In the Technical Mill, the goal is to eliminate all differentiation between the components so that it becomes a seamless flow of movement. The arc of the Clubbell tightens, becoming smaller and more efficient. Performance Breathing is critical to efficiency. The motion of the arm is an Inward Front Arm Circle followed by an Inward Top Forearm Circle (at the top of the Arm Circle) from Intu-Flow (or the older Warrior Wellness program). In my Mills, the driving force comes from an exhalation by driving my solar plexus down and back followed by a counterbalancing hip sway to preserve sideways momentum, and passive inhalation as the Clubbell comes up and into Back Position. This distributes the workload and makes the Mill a true full-body exercise. Compare the clip of the Technical Mill to that of the Performance Mill and note the differences.

Technical Mill: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2GIDqjf4a0>

The Switch

To perform Mills non-stop, you need to switch hands now and then. One way is the Simple Toss-Switch. This method is recommended for those who are not already familiar with advanced aerial switches. As your Clubbell comes up, release with your top hand and catch the handle in your bottom hand. Let the Clubbell's weight provide the impetus for bringing it to Back Position. While safe and effective, this method results in losing a partial rep because you don't complete the rep just prior to the switch, and it sacrifices speed when the direction of the movement is reversed.

Simple Toss-Switch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6bLYvc0ymA>

The Challenge

My goal was to preserve the inertia of the movement and to switch hands without dropping any partial reps. The biggest stumbling block was the necessity of reversing the direction of the Clubbell. While combing through articles and discussions on Mills for ideas, I was inspired by Max Andranov's 2005 article on Extended Mills and his Pivot concept. Extended Mills are done with the arm fully extended throughout the movement, essentially doing a Front/Back Arm Infinity with a Clubbell. Since both Performance and Technical Mills require the arm to bend, some modification of the basic Pivot was necessary.

To preserve the dynamic of the movement, it is necessary to let the bell lead the rest of the Clubbell. This requires your hand to be at least as high as your shoulder before the elbow bends, and the barrel of the Clubbell stays in line with the dorsal plane of your body. This is very similar to doing Shoulder Casts. A Shoulder Cast moves from Back Position to the side, then back again.

Shoulder Cast: Back Position and End Position



The challenge is getting the Clubbell from one hand to the other. Here's a drill that combines the Shoulder Cast with a basic Toss to Muscle Out. Do a Shoulder Cast to Muscle Out, then let your arm drop and swing across your body. As it comes up on the other side, have your opposite hand ready. Release the Clubbell and catch it in Muscle Out. Then bring it to Back Position. You can transfer the Clubbell from hand to hand behind your back to continue the drill in circular fashion, or you can reverse it from side to side. This is a fun way to sophisticate the basic movement into Alternating Shoulder Casts with a Toss-Switch!

Alternating Shoulder Cast Toss-Switch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6unjOL0Kzw>

The Pivot

Once you are comfy with that, it's time to add the Pivot. The Pivot is basically just turning in place so that you are facing the opposite direction. Not too hard without a Clubbell, right?

Pivot: Start, Middle, and End Positions



Now put those concepts together. Do an Inward Pendulum, and make the hand switch as the Clubbell handle is coming up to shoulder height. Release the Clubbell upwards, Pivot in place and catch it in Muscle Out. Bring it to Order, then do an Inward Pendulum, pivot and catch it in Muscle Out with the other hand. This is more challenging!

Pivot Toss to Muscle Out: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piEESFiof84>

Putting It All Together: The Mill Pivot-Switch

Combine it with a slow Mill. Start with an Inward Pendulum, pivot and catch it in Muscle Out with the other hand. Bring it to Back Position, then cast it forward into another Inward Pendulum. Do a full Mill, then pivot and catch in Muscle Out with the other hand. Keep alternating every few Mills, and work on making it smooth and easy before you worry about speed. For most people, it's a good idea to drop to a lower Clubbell weight or to choke up when learning this. Don't get overconfident, as your Clubbell may put you to sleep and give you a headache.

Once you have the movement smooth and flowing, add speed. Here's how it looks with my Technical Mills now that I've grooved it. Notice that it preserves the Mill dynamic and doesn't cost me any partial reps. Watch the Clubbell to see how it stays in line with the plane of my body. Groove the component movements to execute them cleanly, and you'll find the Mill Pivot-Switch adds a lot of fun to any ICS practice session!

Alternating Mills with Pivot-Switch - Front: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wtsltmbmcqg>

Alternating Mills with Pivot-Switch – Side: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G75GclH7dII>

Have fun and train smart!

About the author:

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