

DVRT Restoration: Bird Dog Series

The Bird Dog is not an unfamiliar exercise to most practitioners. Yet, we often rush people through the drill or miss many of the nuances that make it a very powerful exercise for evaluating pelvic control.

The Bird Dog series provides us a lot information about the individual's movement capabilities in a safe environment. What movements? The Bird Dog is part of Dr. Stuart McGill's "Big 3" movements for good reason. On one hand we have the cross patterning that we have covered its importance. Being in a position of all fours we have to learn to create more trunk "stiffness" than when we are supine. Trunk stiffness helps us learn to create bracing which is the function we want in creating spinal stability.

Raising one arm and leg off the ground creates anti-rotational forces for the torso as well. The ability to resist rotation is the key in mastering prior to learning to create rotation.

We want to make sure that the individual understands how to create proper hip extension through hamstring and gluteal activation. Making sure that the client fully extends the hips is crucial in providing proper gluteal re-education. Equally as important this is foundational to learning how to "finish" the movement in more dynamic hip extensor actions.



This is actually a very key core training concept. The core is meant to provide a stable platform for the extremities to move from and efficiently. Unfortunately, most people lose their stable core

when we start moving the arms and legs. Such an inability to stabilize the trunk during these actions is a key indicator that we NOT built actual functional core strength.

As Dr. McGill describes, *“The core, more often than not, functions to prevent motion rather than initiating it, which is contrary to the approaches that many trainers employ in designing exercise for their clients. Good technique in most sporting, and daily living tasks demands that power be generated at the hips and transmitted through a stiffened core. Pushing, pulling, lifting, carrying, and torsional exertions are enhanced using this basic technique of hip power generation but are compromised when the spine bends causing what is often referred to as “energy leaks.”*

Interestingly, these task classifications greatly assist the organization of program design (think of building exercises to fulfill a push, pull, lift, carry, and a torsional buttressing task rather than specific isolationist exercises for the abdominals, back extensors, latissimus dorsi, and the like).”

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Finally we have action of the opposing arm that will help activate the lower trap, identify if the upper trapezius are overactive, and again how to brace the torso during the actions of the extremities. However, most people also miss the fact by raising one arm we are learning the foundational concept of “cork screwing” the stance arm into the ground to create stability and strength. So, both arms are equally as important and must be watched.



With all that said, why would the Ultimate Sandbag being a preferred training tool versus more common tools than bands? In our experience because of the line of pull of the bands it often encourages people to move into lumbar extension. Using the Ultimate Sandbag does create a different stimulus, but most importantly it tends to do a better job of creating the bracing of the torso that is the basis of the movement.

Common Compensations of the Bird Dog: [Watch HERE](#)

-Too Much Lumbar Extension: As we move to a more challenging position as in the Bird Dog many lose their pelvic positioning. This happens especially as we move the limbs in an opposing pattern. Bracing of the torso is paramount along with driving through the toes of the planted foot and “packing” the shoulder of the “stance” arm.



-Allowing Rotation: The often other compensation to the Bird Dog is the inability to resist rotation, or producing rotation to gain leverage. This can be a sign of the obliques being shut off or weakness in the general pattern.



Bird Dog Iso Pull: The biggest issue with the classic Bird Dog is that people are not taught how to create core “stiffness” while their extremities move. Learning HOW to create stability is a skill set that needs to be taught to the client before reducing the stability by moving the limbs. In order to help the client understand how to brace and create proper tension we will use the DVRT Iso Pull as a powerful teaching tool.

The Iso Pull not only instantly creates core tension, but taps immediately into the Posterior Oblique System that causes better spinal stability. While learning how to use the USB to create proper tension is one important aspect, the other is what the “stance” arm and leg are doing with the ground.

Most coaches only focus upon the movement of the extremities, but the stance arm/leg are the REAL keys in creating proper stability. Learning to “grip” the ground with the hand and ball of foot will activate the appropriate core stabilizers to provide the correct platform for the body to move from and still be stable. Much of the success of the Bird Dog is based upon how one can keep proper interaction of the hand and foot into the ground.

You will find even a few repetitions of the Iso Pull Bird Dog will have a positive impact upon one’s level of core stability and functional movement. Over time, the Iso Pull Bird Dog can be used either as an activation drill or a true core stability exercise.



Building the Bird Dog: Watch [HERE](#)

Keys to the Iso Pull Bird Dog:

- The start position of the USB should be about touching the quads. This is important as this will allow the off arm to properly activate the lat instead of the shoulder.
- The lifter should grab the outside handle with a supinated hand (palm up) to encourage more lat than shoulder activation.
- The goal must be properly expressed to the client that they are NOT to lift the USB, rather simply take slack out of the handle and create appropriate tension.
- Before lifting the arm and grabbing the handle the client should be actively gripping the ground with the hands and ball of feet. This should be tension being directed into the ground and already having tension through the body.
- Initially the client can grab the outside handle first creating more stable platform to extend the leg from without losing the position of the trunk. Over time, they can become actions performed at the same time!

Lateral Bird Dog Drag: [Watch HERE](#)

Typically the Bird Dog is taught only with the arm coming forward, but in reality we can move the arm many different directions. Yes, while straight out makes the most sense in correlating to gait, however, manipulation of leverage is something when used with a purpose can add some very useful progression.

Why would we move to the drag laterally? This will not only change the muscles used in the shoulder slightly, it will increase the stress of anti-rotation. Due to these factors moving to a lateral Bird Dog drag will be a subtle and significant stress/progression at once.

We can begin these progressions without actually moving in the Bird Dog and just becoming more comfortable with the quadruped position. The body is bearing more load in this position so it is a greater stress than the supine positions performed earlier in the DVRT Restoration program.

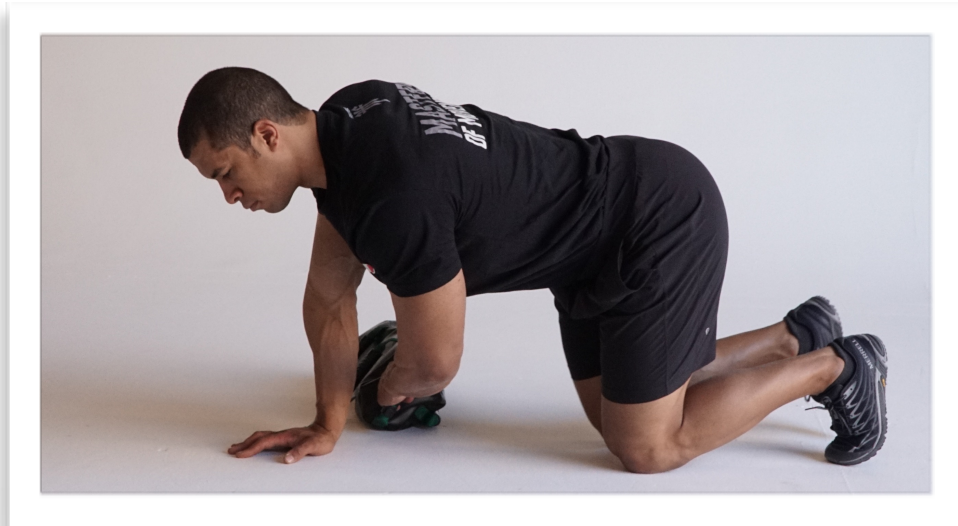
Diagonal Bird Dog Drags: [Watch Here](#)

It is essential to learn how to brace the torso, create tension in the lat, dig into the ball of the foot to activate the glutes, before we add more movement. The key is to RESIST motion in these progressions so if we see compensation early on then we need to spend more time in building up a stronger base.

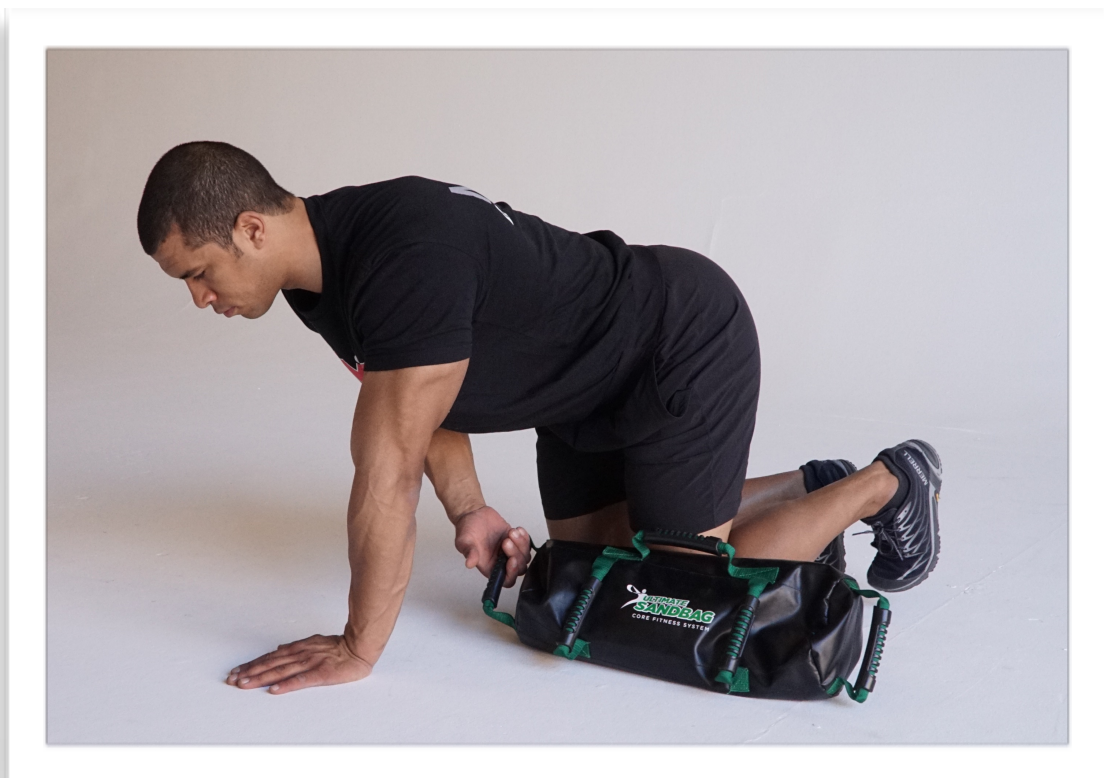


A common miscue is that the client will try to lift the Ultimate Sandbag instead of creating a strong drag. We want to create deliberate friction in the ground, not only do we lose important elements if we pick-up the Ultimate Sandbag instead of dragging, we also encourage rotation of the torso. None of these are ideal for the performance of the Bird Dog progressions.

One of the simple and powerful reasons to use the Ultimate Sandbag is the fact we can easily change the direction of movement to create new stresses and add layers of progressions. Using a diagonal drag takes us to more familiar lift/chop type of patterns. This type of stimulus has been used as a means of build more reflexive core patterns as in PNF.



It would make sense that if we can use such training in supine, kneeling, and even standing postures, that the use of them in positions like the Bird Dog could be highly beneficial in activation and re-education of the body. The key, just like in lateral movements of the USB, is to create a deliberate drag versus trying to “lift” the USB.





Bird Dog with Band Resistance: [Watch HERE](#)

While mostly in our DVRT programs we focus upon the use of the Ultimate Sandbag, we are open to the implementation of other tools, especially if they can enhance what we are trying to accomplish in our DVRT drills. A great example is the use of a mini band with the Bird Dog movement.

Our emphasis so far has been the activation and higher stress of the core and lat, yet, we have the other side of the body to concern ourselves with as well. Increasing glute activation with a stable core is a key aspect of truly benefitting from the Bird Dog. Placing focus on this movement gives us additional insight into movement compensations that one can have as well as coordination issues in fundamental movement patterns.

Using a LIGHT band key, as with all DVRT movements we never want load to cause compensation in movement. If one excels with a lighter tension, then higher tension bands can be applied. However, you will want to watch for the following....

- External rotation of the pelvis and/or leg
- Too much lumbar extension
- Too much hip flexion in the stance leg

Once we apply a new stress to the body (i.e. the band to the lower body) you will want to go back to a more stable environment with the core and upper body. This would mean transitioning back to the Iso Pull. That allows us to progress in the following manner....

- Iso Pull Bird Dog
- Lateral Drag Bird Dog
- Diagonal Drag Bird Dog

Then sequence the same with tension of the band in the lower body.



Lateral Drag: Watch Here

There may be no more popular DVRT drill than Lateral Drag. The obvious crossover to push-ups and planks makes it a favorite of many coaches. However, the trouble stems from proper performance and intent of the drill. While most get focused upon the transfer of the load from one side of the body to the other, this is NOT the most important aspect of the exercise.

You may already see how many layers of progressions are necessary to even approach this movement with the proper movement skills. This is an ADVANCED movement and needs to be layered to provide the client with any chance to have success in the exercise. It is an obvious progression of our Bird Dog series which means many of the same concepts still apply.

The Lateral Drag IS a horizontal pushing drill, but it also has anti-rotational, anti-flexion/extension, patterns that make it very important. Learning how to push while stabilizing the core is a big deal! As Dr. McGill states, *“Similarly, in training, our recent work demonstrated how an individual can only bench press half of their body weight when standing—otherwise they would push themselves over. While laying, bench press performance was primarily governed by the chest and shoulder musculature, whereas stand- ing press performance was governed by core strength, particularly one-arm presses. Thus, the limiting factor in standing press ability was core strength.”*

Such insight actually steers us to better understanding of how we create real world functional strength. While many would automatically assume that building horizontal pressing strength in DVRT would require us to do supine pressing, really understanding the body tells us that Bird Dog and Lateral Drag progressions may be more effective!

The difference of the Lateral Drag to Bird Dog only comes in a more challenging body position. The actual movement concepts are EXACTLY the same. Instead of changing load or other more common training variables, changing body position increases intensity and the level of strength required to maintain the proper kinetic chain connections and movements.

Common Compensations In Lateral Drag Series:

- Not proper ground engagement by stance arm and legs.**
- Trying to “lift” the USB rather than dragging.**
- Moving too fast in the movement (aim is 3-6 seconds from one side to other).**
- Going into hip flexion, rotation, or both in the drill (key indicators to spend more time on Bird Dog progressions).**



Just as in the Bird Dog Progressions, the Iso Pull should be practiced and demonstrate proficiency prior to moving to actual Lateral Drag. This gives us another layer to providing success in training and bridging the gap from one movement to another.



Bear Bird Dog Drag: [Watch Here](#)

The most challenging progression of the Bird Dog variations is the Bear Bird Dog. This combines elements of both the Bird Dog and the Lateral Drag. Supporting one's own bodyweight in the bear position is quite a bit of work in of itself. Adding in the Bird Dog and drag takes it up a few notches.

While this might not seem attainable to many, but if we break down some of the base movements we can make this achievable for more accomplished clients.

Level 1: Hold Bear Position for 1 Minute

Level 2: Crawling for 1 Minute

Level 3: Bear Bird Dog-5 repetitions each side for a 3 second hold

Level 4: Bear Drag-5 slow repetitions each side

Level 5: Bear Bird Dog with Drag



The Bird Dog and Beyond

The Bird Dog has seen somewhat of a resurgence in fitness and rightfully so! It can be a tremendous problem solving exercise as well as help people make better leaps in their fitness. However, what is more important than performing any one of these Bird Dog progressions is actually understanding the intent and desired outcome of each.

For example, most rarely think of the Bird Dog as a means of increasing one's push-up strength. Yet, if we look at the elements of a push-up we see how many valuable aspects of the movement the Bird Dog can enhance. Proper core stability, shoulder/scapular control, pelvic alignment, and the need to drive the full body into the ground. That is the key in problem solving movement, examining the elements that make up an exercise and then determining the right level of that exercise to address those issues.

Yes, that is where the “art” aspect of coaching comes into play as well as experience over time. One of the primary benefits of DVRT though is you don't have to be concerned with being “wrong”. If you choose a progression that is simply too challenging for the client then you simply walk back a step in the system. Instead of trying to jump to a totally new exercise, realizing what the individual lacks and how a different progression can help them be more successful is really the result of good coaching.

The Bird Dog should always be a part of training in some form or another. You see through this series how it can be a very foundational movement to rather advanced. The goal is always to use the proper version of the drill to match the needs of the individual.



References:

1. McGill, Stuart, “Why Everyone Needs Core Training”, <https://www.performbetter.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/PBOnePieceView?storeId=10151&catalogId=10751&pagename=438>