

THE LOST ART OF BASICS

Tumbling Techniques by JR Zeringue

Competitive Cheering is growing by leaps and bounds. Tumbling plays a powerful role in the industry and is sometimes an overwhelming worry for coaches, athletes, and parents. Let us not forget tumbling is only one part of the score sheet and in most cases weighs evenly with stunting, baskets, and pyramids. Frequently, if you ask a coach what an athlete needs to do to reach a specific level, a tumbling skill or sequence is the answer. Parents and athletes will concur almost always.

Tumbling is the reason I am in this industry. It is the best skill I bring to my team. I was never a cheerleader and never aspired to be one. In fact, as many people around me know, I disliked cheerleaders as a whole before I entered the industry. Okay, hold off a minute before you start yelling at this article, my feelings toward cheerleaders have taken a 180 turn. I have had an awakening! My athletes are the third love of my life, following Jesus and my wife.

Now that I have illustrated how my mind can be changed, I sometimes have to do that with my athletes regarding tumbling and reverting back to basics. When I am conducting a tumbling clinic or class and start at the most basic level. I will hear moans and see eyes rolling. "Why do I have to do handstands," an athlete will ask, "I need to have my stand full by next week go tryouts." I cringe when I hear this. I want to help everyone understand why basic tumbling skills are very important.

The first thing a baby learns to do is hold his head up. Next he learns to roll, crawl, stand, and so forth. I have never seen a baby go from rolling over to walking in one week. It takes time to build muscle strength, coordination, balance, and memory. It is a gradual process to more complicated movements. If we can all understand this simple concept, we should be able to apply it to all aspects of our lives.

Tumblers need to be able to master a skill by developing muscles, strength, balance, and memory with skills as simple a forward or backward roll before attempting the same movement in the air. Front flips and back flips are simply more progressive movements of a forward or backward roll and an athlete must work up to this level. So many coaches start out with cartwheels or front and back walkovers. Independent of age, every tumbler should start with the most basic skills of forward and backward rolls and variations of each.

Other basic skills often ignored are the headstand and handstand. The headstand, although rarely taught, is the first skill that can be performed by the youngest athletes and teaches balance and muscle control/strength throughout the body. Handstands are a natural progression and raise the balance bar to the next level. Handstands build strength in the arms, shoulders and core. I often ask, "How many tumbling skills pass through the handstand position?" An athlete will visit the handstand position in cartwheels, round-offs, front walk-overs, back walk-overs, back handsprings, back flips, etc. Handstands are like water: they are in everything.

Cartwheels on both sides are another basic skill often ignored. Why should an athlete do cartwheels on both sides? Symmetry is the answer. A body builder does not go to the gym and only work on right arm curls. This principle applies to tumbling. Everything done on the right side should be done on the left and every forward should be trained backward to some degree. Round-offs and twisting are the exception and are typically performed in one direction.

Sometimes we skip front and back walk-overs. As I mentioned earlier, the front and back walk-overs develop strength, flexibility, and balance. These techniques are used in more advanced tumbling skills as well.

When coaches or athletes find themselves struggling with a particular skill, ask: have you mastered the basics. It's human nature to daydream about your ultimate goal and strive to reach it, but athletes are disciplined creatures and realize the importance in honing our skills. As a tumbling expert, I couldn't be happier sharing my talent with the cheer industry.