

Dear Reader,

I wanted to take a second to personally thank you for purchasing the Premium Edition of my Standing Backhandspring Guide.

While I take pride in keeping my content as free and accessible as possible, buying one of my guides allows me to keep TumblingCoach.com up and running without resorting to annoying and intrusive ads which can ruin everyone's experience (ever been on ESPN.com? My god, I almost want to vomit).



The drills listed in here (and more importantly the order in which they're in) have helped my athletes learn their Standing Backhandspring quickly and efficiently while reducing risk of injury, loss of confidence or frustrating mental blocks. I know you'll find them useful.

Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I'd love to help in any way I can.

- **Coach Sahil M.**

Supposedly invented by the Egyptians (and then later adopted by the Greeks) the back handspring (BHS) is a skill that has a rich history.

But what fascinates me the most, is the thought of **how** they coached it back in the day.

All I can assume, is that there was some serious trial and error resulting in epic fails… and I would've loved to see it.

#AncientTumblingFails

Luckily, over the past few thousand years those methods have been refined.

Heck, in just the last 10-15 years the game has *completely* changed.

Take me for example -- I learned mine without fancy pieces of equipment such the Boulder, PacMac or Octagon Barrel.

I know of many old school gymnasts and tumblers that have a similar story.

So consider yourself lucky, because what I have for you today is a proven, comprehensive guide designed to help you (or your athlete) learn and master the standing back handspring quickly and safely.

But First, Let's Talk About Prerequisites That You Should Have

I know what you're thinking…

"When are we getting to the drills?!"

The drills are coming. In fact, I have over 20 to show you. But the stuff in this section is important. So important, that if you fail to follow the advice, the handspring will be a skill that will forever be out of your reach.

Prerequisite #1: Back Walkover (BWO)

For competitive athletes, this is an absolute must. There is simply no good reason why you should be skipping this skill (or why coaches should let their athletes skip this skill) before attempting a back handspring.

That's because aerial awareness and comfort while being upside down needs time to be developed. Athletes that master their BWO before learning the BHS have a significantly reduced risk of suffering from metal blocks. On the flip side, I've worked with plenty of athletes who were encouraged to jump into learning their BHS without walkovers and are now scared of going backwards. So take an extra month or two and master that BWO. The rewards are well worth it.

Prerequisite #2: Knowing Your Body Shapes (Handstand, Superman, Bridge, Front Support & Hollow)

If you don't know what those shapes are, what they mean or why they're vital to learning handsprings, then I highly suggest you check out my in-depth article which also contains videos detailing all 12 shapes. I even have a poster that describes them in detail. This poster hangs on the wall of some of the top cheer and gymnastics clubs in the World. I suggest you grab a copy.

Let's Talk About That Handstand For A Second

While mastering all 12 shapes is important, you should know that there are two types of handstands I look for. The first is a **free holding handstand** which lasts 5-7 seconds without any type of walking or movement and second is an **assisted handstand** (against a wall) which lasts for 60 seconds.

If an athlete can't execute either one of these handstands to near perfection, we don't work handsprings. Ideally, they should be able to do both.

Prerequisite #3: Handstand Pop (HSPOP)

Because I travel for clinics and sometimes work with athletes that haven't been taught the importance of basics, I don't always have the luxury to impose my prerequisites on them. But trust me on this… the difference between those who've mastered the HSPOP before learning a BHS versus those who didn't is

night and day. In terms of quality and execution, it's not even close; those with a great HSPOP have a much easier time learning BHS and connected BHS's.

So, how do you know you have a great HSPOP? Simple: if you can do it on to a higher surface (such as a panel mat) with good body shapes and lines, you have a great one. Another test I like is to see if athletes can do a double HSPOP.

Prerequisite #4: Handstand Snapdown

If you're working on a BHS and your coach has never made you work a handstand snapdown, there's a problem (or you're very new to tumbling and haven't learned it yet.) Either way, while most call this a "drill" I like to think of it as a skill. That's because a good HS Snapdown takes time to master. If you know your shapes, here's the order to hit if you want beautiful (and functional) HS Snapdowns:

HS > Superman > F.Support > Hollow

The "snap" takes place right after the superman shape as gravity is about to take over.

"Wait a minute… isn't front support on the floor, like a pushup?" You might be thinking.

While we practice the front support on the floor, it's still just a specific shape. This means in tumbling, it can (and should) be used in any orientation that's useful for our purpose. In fact, there's another very fundamental tumbling skill that's basically a front support but flipped upside down in the air.

Can you guess what it is? Click here for the answer if you can't stand the suspense.

Prerequisite #5: Round Off Back Handspring

Bet you weren't expecting that, were ya? (Unless you've taken my clinics in the past… then you probably saw this coming.)

Allow me to explain.

Forget tumbling for a second and let's consider a simpler activity; Let's say you and I found a ball and wanted to kill some time playing catch.

Great.

Now let's assume that for 30 minutes, all I ever did was lob the ball, **nice and easy** right into your hands. Then let's say that out of the blue, I got bored of these easy throws, and decided to whip a *fast one* your way as if I'm in the Major Leagues.

What do you suppose would happen?

Nothing good, that's for sure. This is because I allowed your brain to adjust and become comfortable doing an action (catching a lobbed ball) at a certain rate of speed. So when I suddenly cranked up the velocity and reduced the required reaction time, your brain couldn't keep up.

And now you probably have a bloody nose. Sorry about that.

Now let's consider a gentler scenario. Suppose in our game of fantasy catch, all we ever did was whip the ball at each other as if we're trying to drill a hole through the other person's hands. Then suddenly, out of the blue, I decided to throw a slow lob your way.

What do you suppose would happen this time?

It would feel like you're waiting for the grass to grow and you'd most certainly be able to adjust your reaction times and catch it.

That's because going from FAST to SLOW suddenly, is easy.

But suddenly going from SLOW to FAST? That's some scary stuff!

Now let's get back to tumbling. **Answer me this:** What do you suppose is faster, a RO BHS or a Standing BHS?

Don't guess! Think about it for a second.

If you said RO BHS, then congratulations! You've been paying attention.

About 90% of athletes that book a private lesson with the aim of wanting to learn a RO BHS already have their standing BHS. This is just what I've experienced over the years.

But oddly enough, almost all of those athletes suffer from an exaggerated amount of fear when it comes to connecting the BHS to a RO because it simply feels too fast. (Note: I say "exaggerated" because having SOME fear is normal.)

In their brain, strong neurological connections have been built which say *"THIS is how fast a BHS should be!"*

So when we speed things up, their body simply freezes. (More specifically, their subconscious brain says "hell no!")

Another reason you want to learn a RO BHS first, is because it's vastly easier. One of the big bottlenecks to any standing skill (be it BHS, Tuck or Full) is leg strength and jumping power.

This means you can have the best shapes, the best shoes, the best coach, the best parents and the best everything… but if you lack jumping power, you'll never be able to do a Standing BHS.

But anyone can learn how to hurdle (or run) into a tight, clean RO that will help them generate and preserve momentum which will carry into a BHS. And I really do mean anyone (assuming they're trained properly.)

Some Final Thoughts For Coaches (And Smart Athletes)

Note that while the mastery of a RO BHS is highly recommend before a Standing BHS, this does NOT mean standing BHS Drills are to be ignored. Of course, you never want a new athlete to just throw a RO BHS with full power when learning, and there are definite benefits to slowing down motor patterns before speeding them up.

Athletes of mine that are working their RO BHS will definitely do standing BHS type drills. In fact, to the inexperienced eye it won't seem vastly different. But if you watch closely, every drill they do is designed and geared towards improving their running pass first, not standing. What I'm referring to is the end goal. Do what it takes to teach a good RO BHS first. Then the ST BHS not only comes easier, but they'll mentally be better off. My complete guide on RO BHS and connecting multiple BHS is coming… so stay tuned.

Idiot Warning

Please keep in mind to watch the drill animations for their theory and mechanics, NOT execution. Most of my videos are captured during an athlete's learning phase. Also, please do not perform these drills unless you're in the company of a certified coach and have their permission to do so. The information on this website is presented purely for entertainment purposes only. You are solely liable for any injuries that may occur. Basically, don't be an idiot. And if you are planning on being an idiot, don't blame anyone else but yourself for the consequences.

Drill #1: The Back Walkover Snapdown (30 reps)

See? Told you that the BWO would come in handy -- it's needed in my very first drill! This is basically a hybrid of the two skills in order to get the athletes finishing properly and speeding things up. The ideal scenario would be to start the BWO at a medium speed, then as the legs lock together at the 12'O clock position, snapdown as fast as possible.

Drill #2: Half Limber (10 reps per angle change)

Pretty much exactly as it sounds. This allows the athletes to get the feeling of a "jump" or "push" while in an upside down position and training them for the full limber, which can be challenging. Please note that you should start with a gentle arch, then work your way down. It can be a little scary to kick into a HS and not feel the wall on your feet for half a second as you're falling over. If you try this drill for yourself, you'll know what I'm talking about.

Drill #3: Limber (20 reps)

I tell my kids the limber is basically a two-legged walkover (since that's a skill which is fresh in their minds) which starts from a bridge. If an athlete has become proficient at Drill #2, then they should only need some light assistance to help them get over. If limbers aren't possible and they keep getting stuck, there are only really 2 possible problems: 1) Bad body shapes or
2) Not enough jumping power. Both can be solved by going back to Drill #2.

Drill #4: The 3 Step Process (15 Reps)

I teach the ST BHS with a very simple 3 step process. It goes as follows:

1. Sit
2. Fall
3. Jump (with hip-drive)

And while doing this drill they need to count "1-2" in their head for each step before executing their next. In fact, the more you can ask them to exaggerate, the better. By the time the athlete puts it all together, you want this process stuck in their head on repeat like a Taylor Swift song.

Drill #5: 3 Step Process + Jump Back (As Many Reps As It Takes)

Now it's time to take the 3 step process and make it realistic. This drill is actually my "barrier to entry". If an athlete can't follow the 3 steps AND jump high enough so that ¾ of their body is on a surface that's slightly above their hips, they won't be doing more advanced BHS drills. Remember that bottleneck I talked about? This is where you test it. As a coach, this will save you **a lot** of time, hassle and tweaked muscles. You're welcome.

Drill #6: Arm Swing Training (30 reps)

You can have a great jump, but if you can't open your shoulders (in other words, get your arms to go back PAST your ears) then you'll never have a good, powerful BHS. This is true for running or standing. So make sure arm swing training is part of your BHS training. You can use the Boulder, Octagon, Round Barrel or an inverted Pac Mac like I am. Coaches: Once the shaping is correct, ask

your athletes to focus on speed. I have some BONUS arm swing training videos in the Premium Edition of this guide, should you be interested.

Drill #7: Hipdrive Bridge (20 reps)

I picked this name because the athlete's job is to start in a slanted L-Sit shape, then turn it into the Superman shape, effectively acting as a "bridge" between the gap. If you don't have blocks, you can use two sturdy stools with some kind of cushion underneath, lifting the athlete high enough so they're not too piked while starting (Note: an L-Sit is simply a pike at 90 degrees while being tight in the core.)

Drill #8: Hipdrive Shoulder Pop On PacMan (20 reps)

So this drill is the reason why I recommend a solid HSPOP before starting BHS. Athletes: If yours is weak, expect to go face first into the mat, wedge, wall or whatever you happen to be going into. Trust me, I've seen it happen. And yes, it's pretty funny since it's generally harmless. Coaches: if you have an aggressive jumper or someone with strong legs but a weak HSPOP, a bloody nose awaits… so be careful.

Drill #9: Falling Back Handspring (30 reps)

This can be done with the Boulder, Roller or Octagon barrel. The reason I use this drill first (before letting them jump into the BHS) is because I want my athletes getting accustomed to a certain amount of speed. If they can hold a tight shape while going over quickly, there's a much higher chance that the actual ST BHS won't fall apart.

Drill #10: L-sit Limber (20 reps)

If you don't have the equipment for the previous drill, you can spot the athlete (more on that soon) and also combine it with this drill. I use this even if I have access to the Boulder due to the shaping required. In the animation above you'll see the athlete is a little piked – that's how most of them look when the first try it. The ideal order of shapes would be:

L-Sit > Bridge > HS > F.Support

Drill #11: Spotted Falling Back Handspring (30 Reps)

This is not only a variation of drill #9, but it's a fantastic way to introduce junior coaches into learning the spot and timing for a back handspring. If you're an athlete and new to the skill, ask for this spot specifically first (i.e before adding the jump). There are 2 ways to spot a ST BHS, and I cover these in my Intensive Coach's clinics. But for now, this is a great way to start. See if you can spot the order of shapes required – and make sure you (or your athletes) are hitting it.

Drill #12: Standing BHS Over Equipment (40 reps)

Most of you know that I don't lack for equipment. However, I decided to use this "ghetto" set up to show that you really can use just about anything to assist the BHS. Having the Boulder is nice, but you can just as well use a rolled up mat or a beaten up roller. What's important, is to ensure the athlete is following the 3 steps, and set the drill up to the appropriate height. Aim for above hips but below shoulders. Start with landing in F.Support, then eventually you can ask them to do a HS Snapdown into a rebound.

Drill #13: Heavy Spotted Back Handspring (15 reps)

There is one thing that should be glaringly obvious after watching this drill -- and that's the fact that the athlete has a massive jump. While I call this drill a "heavy spot"… believe me when I say this, the athlete barely felt heavier than a feather. That's how the spot for a ST BHS *should* feel… assuming you (or your athlete) spent an adequate amount of time perfecting drill #5.

Drill #14: Light Spotted BHS Downhill (15 reps)

By this point, a coach is only really there for confidence. You can also refer to this as a "shadow spotted" BHS. My main goal is to make sure they take off with adequate height (hence the slight bump) and to make sure a safety arm is there incase their arm collapses for whatever reason. 99% of the time, if you followed

the process I've laid out the athlete should almost have no problems when they get to this point. I highly recommend finishing in F.Support.

Drill #15: Unspotted BHS On Tramp (50 reps)

The transition from the previous drill to this one should be up to the coach. While 15 reps is a good safe bet, note that **it might take longer** for some athletes to build the confidence to try it by themselves for the very first time. Again, if the process is followed (doing all 14 previous drills before their very first attempt) then there shouldn't be much fear. Most important part of this process is to make sure they hit all their shapes and get faster every rep. Every tumbler has a "terminal velocity" – where their speed just can't realistically get any faster without additional strength and conditioning work. But this terminal velocity takes time to find… hence 50 reps.

Drill #16: Unspotted BHS Downhill + F.Support (20 reps)

Pretty much the same set up as Drill 14. Again, the transition to this drill from 15 and the height of the cheese/wedge mat is up to the coach. What I personally look for is if Drill 15 is done high enough so the hands barely touch (almost like a whip). Another transition step you can use is to go from Tramp to Tumble Trak then to a cheese/wedge mat. I've used both paths of progression before, and they both work. It just comes down to the comfort level of the athlete.

Drill #17: Unspotted BHS Downhill + Rebound (40 reps)

Once Drill 16 has been mastered and the athlete's initial body shapes are good, allowing them to snap down and rebound should be a very natural transition. Too many coaches let their athletes "land" the skill when it's new, resulting in sloppy legs and knees that buckle. You want to ensure they are tight **before** allowing them to finish. So don't skip Drill 16.

Drill #18: Unspotted BHS On Soft Level Surface (50 Reps)

One of the biggest questions I get is: "When can athletes go from doing BHS on a cheese/wedge to a more realistic and flat surface?"

My answer is simple: Once they can do Drill 17 from the very end of the cheese/wedge where they don't have much help.

Now notice that we don't simply go to a flat hard surface. While the setup is level, there is still a bit of **give and softness** in case they don't jump as high as they should.

Drill #19: Unspotted BHS On Hard Surface (Minus Snapdown) (20 reps)

I'd say this drill is optional, but highly recommended. It's a great way to prevent those BHS that end up piking down. Notice that if my athlete DID pike down, her toes would miss the edge of the mat. Piking is only a problem **if you don't address it** in the beginning – which is why I highly recommend this set up before letting them complete the actual ST BHS.

Drill #20: Skinny Mat BHS (30 reps)

After Drill 19 it's pretty obvious that you'll let the athlete try it on floor, but I wanted to give you some extra drill set ups I like to use to keep things clean and tidy. Since cheerleaders need to BHS next to another person and gymnasts have to BHS on beams, asking them to do it on a restricted amount of space is a great idea. For gymnast, the mats can keep getting skinnier until they're ready for beam.

Drill #21: ST BHS On Panel Mat (20 reps)

This is a great drill that you should use often once an athlete has "gotten" their ST BHS to ensure that they don't forget how high to jump. If you (or your athlete) currently "have" a ST BHS and want to know if it's good enough, do this drill and check. A lack of adequate jump height will result in arms buckling/bending and you'll either do the worm or a push up out of the BHS. **A word of advice:** make sure the fingers face <u>each other</u> while doing a BHS so that the elbows can bend safely. I've seen too many athletes do BHS while their fingers face away from each other, resulting in elbow hyperextension and dislocation.

Drill #22: ST BHS Uphill (20 reps)

Want to know if someone is ready to connect 2 ST BHS's together? Ask them to do this drill with a rebound. I won't lie, it's a challenge. I've rarely seen any athlete do this drill perfectly. It really stresses the jumping power and the quality of the HS Snapdown. What I've shown in the animation above is one that's "good enough". It's a barrier to entry that shows me an athlete will have enough power if we were to connect two (or three) ST BHS's on a level surface.