

Mastering the grip, the release and the flat sail in the discus

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At the beginning of each track season there are throwing fundamentals that have to be re-introduced to our veterans and presented for the first time to our rookies. Three basics that have a huge impact on the success of the thrower are the grip, the release, and the ability to obtain a flat sail in the discus.

The Grip- There are two standard grips used in the discus. One is the **Claw**. In this grip the athlete places the rim of the discus on the first joint of the throwing hand with the tips of the fingers resting over the edge. The thumb is placed on top of the discus in a comfortable position without letting the thumb go over the side of the rim. The fingers are evenly spread over the top of the discus, again this should be in a fashion that is comfortable for the thrower.

The second is the **Power** grip. Here the thrower puts the index and middle fingers together forming a stronger release point for the discus. All other hand placement is the same as for the claw grip. This is a grip that you might use with an athlete that has a smaller hand (middle school or youth).

The Release- The discus should be released in such a manner that it rotates in a clockwise fashion for your right handed throwers and counter-clockwise for your left handed throwers. A proper release should come out of the front of the hand with the index finger and the thumb being the last part of the hand leaving the discus. Some throwers will remove the index finger causing the discus to come off of the middle finger this should be avoided as it can lead to a poor release.

Here are two drills that you can use to help get a proper release. First, the **Flip** drill; in this drill we place the discus properly into the throwing hand and flip it into the air. As we do this we want to have the discus rotating correctly and we want to squeeze the discus out of the hand so that the thumb comes over the middle of the discus and the index finger is the last finger to leave the discus. At first many new throwers will have the discus come out of the back of their hand and it will rotate in the wrong direction. Keep working the drill until the discus is rotating properly.

Second is **Bowling**. This drill can be done on the track or in an open field. Have the athlete place the block leg in front of their throwing leg, bent the knees and the waste and bowl the discus. Once athletes have this down, you can make a contest out of the drill by seeing how straight and how far they can bowl the discus.

The Flat Sail- Once the athlete can get the proper rotation on the discus, we need to work on getting a flat sail. This can be done in a series of easy steps. At first we want the athlete to place both arms at shoulder level as far away from the body as possible, then we want them to reach across their body with their throwing arm and touch the shoulder of their blocking arm. At this time no other movement is needed. Once the athlete understands this arm placement and movement we can do the following drill.

Walking the Field- In this drill we want the athlete to stand in a proper power position with the arms extended level with their shoulders, now have them turn their feet in the direction of the throw and let the arm come across and touch the other shoulder. Next we put a discus in their hands and have them throw the discus as they walk up and down the field working on having the discus sail flat out of their hands. They can work on the wind up here but don't let the arm dip or the upper body bend to much. Don't let them try and throw for any distance, if they do their arms will drop below their shoulder and the wrist will come up(not a good thing). You can also be working on proper rotation at this time. Here might be a good time to introduce a proper blocking sequence as well.

Coaches want to watch for these common flaws while doing this drill:

- 1) The athlete drops his/her arm below shoulder level. When the thrower does this a scooping action begins. We don't want this coming into the throwing motion because it becomes a hard habit to break later. So get the thrower on the proper road early.
- 2) Wrist-up- This will happen if the scooping action becomes part of the throwing motion. Usually happens when the athlete tries to get artificial height on the throw. Make sure the arm is coming straight across the body at shoulder level. If the wrist is up the discus is no longer on a flat plain and will be adversely effected by the wind.
- 3) Discus comes out the back of the hand. The release has not been mastered. Return to flip and bowling drill.
- 4) Wobbly flight pattern. The athlete is not squeezing the hand across the discus at release. Here the thumb is being lifted off of the discus at release which causes it to fall out of the hand and lose stability. This causes lose of rotation and therefore distance.