

THROWING THE JAVELINE FINNISH STYLE

by

RUNAR OHLS

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By winning the first three places in the Los Angeles Olympiad, Finnish Javelin throwers definitely proved their superiority in this sport. All the Finns use essentially the same style as given below, their methods differing in many particulars from the styles used in America.

The javelin is grasped by the thumb and second finger (not the forefinger), the tip of the finger being placed against the binding where the end of the cord is tucked under the last loop with the first and second joints curled around the shaft. The thumb also grips behind the binding, its tip touching the tip of the second finger, or lying straight along the shaft if the hand of the individual finds that position more comfortable. The forefinger is stretched back along and curled around the shaft (flexed, not straight); and the third and little fingers, spread apart, grasp the binding. The shaft of the javelin should rest in the hollow of the hand against the base of the thumb. The grip is firm but the shaft must not be squeezed tightly, resting lightly in the palm. The advantages of this grip are many. The second finger is larger and stronger than the forefinger, thus aiding more in the throw; the forefinger acts to steady the shaft, to keep it from leaving at a tangent, and from whipping; and with this grip much better control is had throughout. Also it is possible to give some spin to the shaft as it leaves the hand, the fingers and a wrist snap imparting the movement. Of course the advantages of such a spin are obvious, just as

with a bullet.

Double check marks are used for the approach run, one 90 feet from the takeoff board, the second 30 feet from it. The total run is about 105 feet. All these distances vary slightly with the individual. The preliminary run is to gain speed, the left foot strikes the first check and the thrower runs at almost top speed for eight strides, the left foot then striking the second check. The run is much faster than in the American method, but is not at full speed. During the run the javelin is carried above the right shoulder, point down, with the hand at a level just above the ear. If carried with the arm extended behind, it tends to turn the body sideways and to slow up the run. Also it is extremely difficult to keep the spear straight in the line of flight, for the point is liable to swing out. Carried in this way the thrower has his mind on the javelin; carried above the shoulder he can forget the javelin and devote his attention to the run and hitting his checks properly.

From the second check mark (struck with the left foot) the thrower will take five steps to complete his manoeuvre, and he counts them to himself, or even audibly in practice - one, as the right foot strikes the ground; two as the left foot comes down, etc. Until the count of two it is important to keep the body and the feet straight to the front.

At two the left foot is turned slightly pigeon-toed. On the third count and step, the right foot is turned out, the line of the foot parallel with the takeoff board, and the right leg makes a front crossover step (crosses in front of the left leg), which brings the body into position for the throw. At four the left foot is advanced in a long stride and the throw is made, the fifth count and step being a semi-reverse, with the right foot coming down just behind the takeoff board, the line of the foot at right angles to the board, body square to the front. Finnish throwers practice the run and count of five continually, making no attempt to throw far, but trying to develop smoothness and rhythm.

At the count of one the right arm is raised slightly and the point of the javelin is brought up to the level of the shoulder, care being taken to keep the spear aimed directly in the line of flight. The arm is then drawn straight back of the shoulder for the throw reaching its extreme backward limit at the count of three, the body turning automatically to the right during the crossover step. The arm starts forward at four, the throw being made with both feet planted firmly on the ground wide apart, with a much wider stance than is used by American throwers. The leg spread is just as wide as the thrower can make it comfortably. It is the wide spread position of the feet which checks the forward progress of the body and acts as

a brake at the moment the throw is made, the reverse completing the check which is so effective that only a semi-reverse is needed. The thrower may hop once or twice on his right foot to retain his balance, but Finnish throwers seldom foul if their takeoff is properly established.

When the throwing stance is taken, the trunk should not be twisted too far to the right, but the right hip is drawn back under the body as far as possible. Then, as the throw is made, the hip is swung forward sharply, this adding body impetus to the javelin. In making the throw the Finns get much impetus from the body, the back muscles below the right shoulder furnishing much extra power, though the arm motion is much the same as in the American style, the elbow coming forward in advance of the hand. When the arm is brought back for the throw the body must be erect and the stomach must not be thrust out or bowed. However the right shoulder is drawn back so that the tip of the extended javelin almost touches the ground behind. (An excellent photograph of Matti Jarvinen in this position may be found on page 50 of our catalog) The right arm comes forward with the hand carried well above the head rather than past the ear. As the hand passes the head it is several inches higher than is usual in the American style. If the body were erect at this point, the hand would pass almost directly above the center of the head, but it actually goes to the right of the head because the body is bending forward and to the left.

The head must not tilt too far nor turn too much to the left, nor should the body break at the waist. The whole effort is to put as much of the weight of the body in the throw as is possible, rather than to depend principally on the arm. A follow through of the body into the reverse should not be neglected, nor a final wrist flick. The spear is whipped rather than thrown like a baseball.

Men who have had their muscles developed by manual labor, though not to the extent of muscle-boundness, will ordinarily make the best throwers. Size is not particularly important, though a long arm and large hand are advantages. Most American athletes are students who have not developed the back muscles just below the right shoulder, and the coach must caution them not to throw hard at first or a bad strain will result here. The best exercise to develop these and all other muscles used in this style of throwing is wood chopping. Almost the same motion is involved throughout. A javelin thrower changing from American to Finnish style must be careful not to strain these back muscles, for he has not been using them in his former method.

Javelin throwing is not learned in a short time and if an experienced thrower changes his style he must realize that it will take some time before results are obtained. Once smoothness and coordination begin to come, or if the thrower happens to get his timing right only once in practice, he will

quickly realize the advantages of the Finnish style. He will note that the throw is a smooth application of force, perfectly timed, starting from the toes, continuing through the body, and ending with the final push of the second finger.

Matti Jarvinen has thrown 243 feet 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, for a world record; Matti Sippila's best is 230 feet; and Eino Pentilla has done 229 feet. These three men finished in the order named in the 1932 Olympic Games. More than twenty others have bettered 200 feet and some of them have come close to the leaders above, which is a remarkable showing in a country of only three million people and demonstrates the superiority of Finnish javelin-throwing methods.