EJC report

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August 14, 1998

Contents

Chapter 1

Workshops

1.1 Juggling on a unicycle

The key to it is lateral balance. Obviously, you've got to be able to idle on the spot. Forward/backward should not be a problem. The upper body, chest, head and shoulders, has to stay vertical, the rocking motion should come from the lower body. The idea is to have a smooth rocking motion, without exageration, so that your center of gravity stays on the spot. A very useful exercise is to hover with your arms crossed in front or behind you, in order to learn to keep your balance without using your arms.

If you don't care whether you move about or not, that's all there is to the unicycling part. As far as juggling goes, you should be a pretty smooth juggler. Your pattern may have to be a wee little bit higher and wider than usual. Since you're going to be rocking on the unicycle, you'll have to avoid you knee. *A useful exercise would be to learn to juggle with one knee raised.* Also, in order to keep a better balance on the unicycle, you should be able to look in the distance, directly forward, watching the clubs with peripheral vision, slightly out of focus. Definitely not a problem if you're already a passer. It's also useful to be able to keep juggling while moving and turning around: this is a problem that corrects itself with time, but at first, your unicycle will move around quite a bit as you try and juggle.

Rythm is not a problem. Apart from starting, synchronization between the rocking motion and juggling is not necessary. It will probably occur naturally, as it is a plain feature of the human mind that simple rythms are easier to take care of.

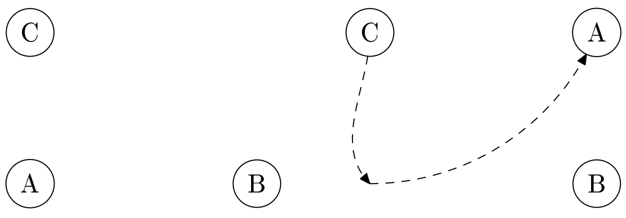
Passing on a unicycle is a whole different story. You've got to have much more control on your direction and exact position, which means you have to learn to correct sideways unbalance without moving away from a spot. This might also be a problem if you're not a smooth juggler. *An exercise which helps a lot is learning to move sideways by rocking back and forth,* exagerating the angle in one direction (probably back for me, I'll have to check). This is the main insight I got from this workshop. I was wondering why I was always turning rightways when I was trying to juggle, when it dawned on me that I had only practiced going to the right in an idling motion. I know what I'll have to correct.

The last problem I have is stamina. I've talked with the workshop organizer about it, my personal problem being that my left ankle tire pretty soon. I must also admit that I'm somewhat out of shape where unicycles are concerned: I haven't gone through any real unicycling sessions for the last six months, being more focused on juggling five balls and various acrobalance skills. It does seem like this is a problem that will fix itself over time. I personnally think I should try to improve my rocking on my weak foot, so that I don't have to spend all my time on my dominant foot. Also, I've probably got into the habit of using too much ankle and not enough knee to control my unicycle.

There were also some standard tricks in that workshop, such as throwing under the leg. The organizer demonstrated that standing on the unicycle, pedals horizontal, keeping balance by twisting, and starting to juggle was somewhat feasible, even though it was by no means perfected yet.

1.2 Bruno's nightmare

Tarim and his passing workshops ! This one depicts a nice passing patterns, for three people on a 3-count[1]. The jugglers move around, as though there was a giant juggler juggling them.



(a) Starting position

(b) After first move

Figure 1.1: The giant juggler

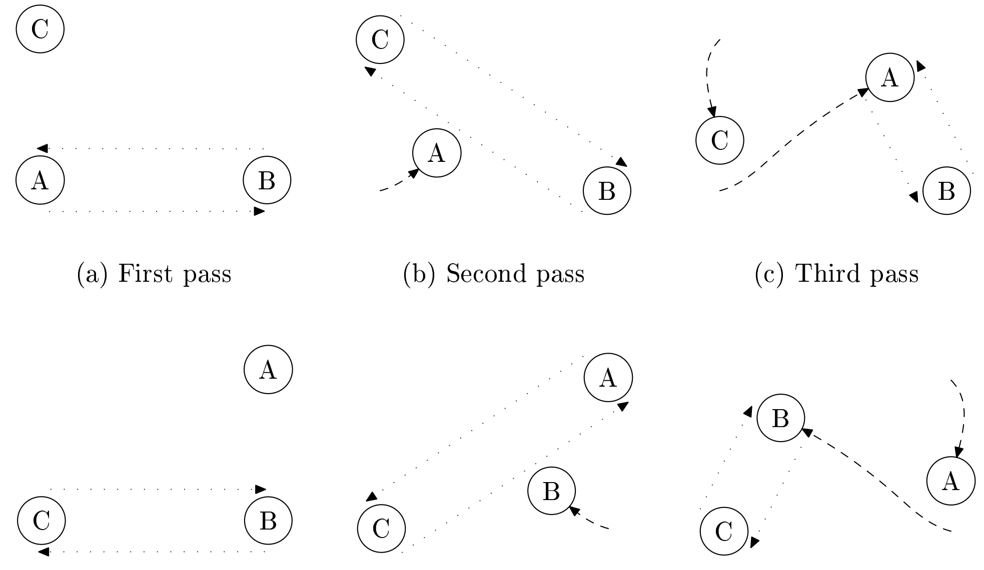
[1] 3-count is the basic rythm left pass–self–self–right pass–self–self–left pass...

Call the jugglers A, B, C, put them on a big rectangle, with A and B on the bottom basis, C on the side of A, on top of him (see figure 1.1.a).

The giant begins by juggling A, hence A crosses over diagonally to end up on top of B. At the same time, C falls down on A former place. We end up with figure 1.1.b.

Then the giant juggles B: B crosses over diagonally, ending on top of C. A falls down to the bottom of the rectangle.

It's finally up to C to cross over, and back we start again, with a mirror of the beginning position.



(a) First pass (b) Second pass (c) Third pass

(d) Forth pass (e) Fivth pass (f) Sixth pass

Figure 1.2: Nightmare

Okay we haven't dealt with passing yes. At the start of the figure, no one moves. B passes his first pass (right) to A (see figure 1.2.a) (hence, C starts with a self), then his second pass (left) to C (see 1.2.b). Right after this pass A moves across to B side, which is easy for him since he has not passed this turn. Then B passes his third pass (left) to A, while C does not pass and moves down to the bottom of the rectangle (1.2.c).

The basic pattern starts again, with roles swapped, and hands reversed ! C does a left pass to B (1.2–d) then a right pass to A (1.2.e), then a left pass to B who crosses over (1.2.f). Since A starts with a self, he has all the time needed to turn around and face C.

After the next cycle, everyone is back to the starting position, but with sides (and hands swapped) ! It takes 6 cycles to fully get back to the starting position.

One feature of 3-count which makes it simultaneously harder and easier is that you're always passing the same 3 clubs around. Now that's easy since you just have to be aware of that specific club to remember when to pass. The hard part is that there is no room for mistake: if you botch a pass, you won't have a club to give to your pattern on the next round, and it's difficult to to make do with the clubs you have, grab the dropped club, while moving around.

The main difficulty I had with this pattern (apart from some lack of space—Tarim's workshop have too much success) was to remember this is a slow pattern. Granted, there is a lot of moving around, but not that many passes. Let's look more closely at the sequence of passes. B with A, B with C, B with A, C with B, C with A, C with B, A with C, A with B, A with C. Looks like pass–pass–pass–pass–self–pass–self–pass–self, and notice that selves occur precisely on the move: first one while starting to move diagonally, second one to turn around, and last one while dropping down to the bottom of the rectangle.

Loads of fun anyway. Needs some reasonably experienced jugglers to work. In particular they must be able to gauge distance for right and left passes, and estimate movement.

1.3 Five clubs

Okay, so I am nowhere near to juggling five clubs. Well, what the hell, at least I'm going to see a good show.

In fact, nothing of the sort. Jay Gilligan is a very good teacher, and most of what he said is a very good advice for improving your juggling, potentially getting to five clubs one day (yeah dream on).

Posture and training

Balance is very important while juggling. For five clubs, he stands firmly on his feet, with his weight distributed evenly on his two legs. Both feet parallel, about shoulder width apart. Jay said that it is very important to be aware of your position, in order to notice what changes between succesfull and unsuccesfull runs: feet, elbows, head, back, all things to notice. Jay insisted that you have to remember what you were doing wrong when a run was bad.

Someone asked how often to train. Jay's answer was 'depends on your schedule, but be consistent about it. It's better to train 10 minutes every two days than to train three hours every two weeks.' Also, count those throws, it's important to notice whether you're making progress or not. Jay believes that practicing an exercise longer than 20 to 25 minutes is a bad idea: your muscles tire, and you soon fall into bad habits. Hence, it's a good idea to switch between balls, clubs, etc.

Now, about five clubs proper. Jay showed a grip proper for multiplexing two clubs. Open your hand, palm outward. Wedge the handle of the first club between thumb and index, like for club swinging. Put the handle of the second club in the palm of your hand. Close your hand. Normally, you will be able to throw both clubs at the same time.

For five clubs, you have to get some lofty doubles (I am not surprised), but hand speed is very important as well. Jay demonstrated a nice exercise: throw a club for a high double, and as it leaves your hand, snap your hand open immediately. This is necessary, as in five clubs, the next club will be along almost immediately.

More about posture: you have to juggle five clubs with your arms somewhat relaxed: not too far from your body, and certainly *not* pointing downwards. You need some margin to correct your mistakes. If you end up catching a club at the bottom of its course, there's no way you'll be able to correct it before rethrow. On the other hand, catching and following, you'll be able to correct simple things.

Back throws

Jay thinks that, in theory, double back throws should be as easy as triples. In practice, the extra split second makes the difference, and triples are much easier. Back throws will lead to lots of frustration, unless your 3 clubs single back-throws are already rock-solid. You need to throw your triples parallel behind your back, so that they peak over your shoulders. Not any farther apart, as you really can't move about without the pattern disintegrating.

Other tricks

Jay demonstrated going from a singles 4 clubs fountain to a doubles 5 clubs cascade through a kick-up. The trick I had never seen before which impressed me the most was his five clubs half-shower, which is a variation on the single-triple standard 4 clubs pattern, except that he keeps his single more lofty. Precisely the same timing as the five balls half-shower (synchronous $(6x, 4x)$ pattern), and beautiful.

Injuries

Jay told us some of his story. When he was younger and learning five clubs, he got some serious tendonitis. He didn't stop, though. Everyday, he would try some juggling anyway, and end up getting worse and worse. Finally, he got some sense and had to stop juggling *completely* for several weeks. His comment "don't do that". When you've got such a problem, you have to stop juggling completely and give your body a rest. Also, don't start juggling sessions by going to five clubs immediately, going around the gym while juggling 3 clubs doubles is a good idea[2].

I must say that I agree completely with Jay on that one. I have a weak left wrist, which gives me trouble occasionally. I've learnt to stop juggling before it really gets injured, as I've already got some serious problems with it two years ago. I've found out that passing without a very serious warm-up is a bad idea, for instance.

1.4 Two people with 3 clubs

This basic worshop demonstrated some standard tricks for two people with three clubs.

This is very much a listening skill: you have to be atuned to your partner, and not get surprised at what she does.

Twins

First person juggles three clubs. Second person comes from the side, catches club instead of first person, and starts juggling with him. Usually, the second person wraps her arm around the first person's shoulder, for comic effect, and for more stability.

Near and far steals

This is the next step after the twins. The second person will steal all three clubs from the first one. You come in from the side. In the near steal, you first grab the club that comes your way, then the far club. In the far club, you reach for the further club first. You have to extend your arm between your partner's arms and the flying clubs, without touching either, grab the club, then move in and go on juggling.

[2]Personally, I use some club swinging for warming up, and I end up with some juggling under the legs to warm my lower body up as well

Flashing

First person juggles, second one comes behind him. First person flashes all three clubs to his back, second person catches them and go on juggling. Usually, the clubs are flashed as doubles, along parallel trajectories[3].

Head, shoulders, and more

First person juggles. Second person gets behind, slightly on one side, and steals a club, then immediately puts it on top of her partner's head, handle projecting forward. The partner grabs the club from the hand that threw it (there is a hole) and resumes juggling. In order for this figure to succeed, the club must be set on top of the head in one swift movement. Experimentally, precise placement is not important, the handle just has to project enough to be grabable, but once you set the club, *you don't move it*, as your partner will judge where the club is from first impressions.

Instead of the head, you can put the club on top of one's shoulder (opposite shoulder, once again), or even on the foot (and retreat fast, if you don't want to catch the kick-up). You can also wedge it between the legs.

The next step is to drop the club in the hand of your partner. It is a bit disconcerting for the person which juggles, but the timing is easy to get right.

Grabing clubs in front

One simple trick is to come right up in front to your partner, and steal all his clubs. You can either do it from below, or from above. Anyway, you will have to reach in and grab the clubs that are turning the wrong way round. Grabing from below may be slightly easier.

Much more impressive is to come from behind, get through your partner's legs, and steal his clubs. Position is important. You must come in almost kneeling, but not quite: to stand up, you must be on your toes. At first, you fold your arms in, like you're praying, you look above, and you decide when to stand up. It's a good idea to always start at the same moment, when the red club reaches your partner's hand, for instance, in order not to startle her. Then in one fluid movement, you stand up, extend your arms up, then to the side (like you're swimming), and you're juggling your partner's club. Your arms must point directly upwards, then to the sides, if you don't want to disturb your partner's club. They must not extend to the sides until you're

[3] In case you're wondering, this is the same throw used for two persons passing back-to-back

above your partner's arms level, but then you have to move quickly, to be able to reach all three clubs. You will have to stand up very close to your partner. Trust is important, this won't do if you mash up her chin.

Walk-around

Who doesn't know about the standard work-around pattern ? As the instructors showed, it is difficult to explain in slow motion. What you can do first is stand behind your partner, and help him juggle, by throwing a club from side to side, in order to get the move and the distance right. Then, the basic walk-around pattern is simple: your partner starts with two clubs, one in his left hand, one in his right hand. You place yourself with one club in your left hand, behind him on his left side. He raises his left hand a bit, you throw your club from left to right, and catch it with your right hand. He starts juggling right after you by throwing the club from his right hand to his left, then the club from his left hand *to your right hand*. And that's it. You end up with one club in each hand, he ends up with a club in his left hand. You just have to move slightly forward, and he slightly backward, to be back to the starting point, with your roles swapped. Repeat ad nauseam. You will notice this pattern does drift to the right. This is easy to compensate: take a step left while moving forward in order to really get into your partner's shoes.

Once you've tried it into both directions, you can try for a change of direction. Just throw the lone club from one side to the other, don't grab your partner's other club, and throw the lone club back. Apart from some coordination, this is easy.

Two-step walk-around

Try analyzing the basic walk-around pattern more thoroughly: two people, four hands, three clubs. This is a 4-count pattern: B throws club 1 from his left to his right hand; B catches club 1 and A throws club 2 from her right to her left hand; A catches club 2 and throws club 3 from her left hand to B's left; B catches club 3 in left hand.

It is possible to up the tempo and go to a 2-count pattern: instead of throwing club 1 from his left to his right hand, B throws club 1 to A's right hand; A throws club 2 upward, and steps left while B steps in; B catches club 2 with left hand, while A throws club 3 to B's right hand, starting the cycle again.

This is a very fast pattern, where both partners turn around each other very fast. The trick to it is to stay very close to your partner all the time.

We haven't been able to do it yet, but we'll keep trying !