

Participants:

Guy Windsor

Curtis Fee

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RECORDING COMMENCES:

Guy Windsor:

Hello. This is a critically important martial arts skill especially if you live if you live in Finland where there's ice on the pavements for about half the year. You will be falling on hard surfaces at some point in your life. You might as well learn to do it without hurting yourself. The basic theory is this, bones hitting hard objects hurt like hell but you actually come equipped with all sorts of padding in the form of muscles and dare I say it, a little bit of subcutaneous fat that can be used to cushion the fall and you want to avoid any kind of sudden stop. So we're going to go through some basic exercises that will help you get a feel for it and we're going to start with the getting up process and then we're going to have a look at the getting down process because if you can't get back up, you probably shouldn't go down.

We'll start with an exercise that we call the starfish where you sit on the ground with your legs out straight and you roll down on one side, use as much support as with this arm as you need and you roll over and you come up on the other side so your left hand goes to your right foot and your right hand goes to your left foot and the whole thing is super relaxed. As you go down, you're contacting the floor with the muscles on the side of your spine and if you do this just right, it feels like your spine is getting a massage. It does not feel like any kind of a sit-up or a lumpy-bumpy thing, lumpy-bumpy thing being a technical term of course. Okay. This is the beginning of the feeling of how you get up from the ground.

The trick to getting up from the ground is getting your hips over your feet because while I'm in this position, I'm stuck but if I can get one foot underneath me and get my hips on top of that foot, from here I can get up. So what you're going to do from sitting on the ground is pull one foot in and then you can use a little bit of pressure on the ground if you like but I prefer to keep my hands off the ground because they're busy doing things like pulling a dagger out of my opponent's belt and stabbing him in the femoral artery with it so yes, you're hands are far too useful to be wasted on falling stuff. So hips over the heel or over the ankle, change your feet, same thing on the other side. Again if this is difficult for you, that's fine. With practice it will get easier but you can use a little bit of support here just to get you over or you can do this next to a pole or a hanging rope or put a chair there just to give you that little bit of extra help up but your objective is for this to be a completely trivial exercise.

We can add to this with a little roll which is the same feeling as the starfish. It's that same feeling of that rolling on the muscles on the side of your spine. Problems with this exercise in terms of --

The Medieval Dagger Course: Falling for beginners

what often happens is people get to this point and they go egh. Your weight will go in the direction that your foot is pointing and if your foot is pointing too far over this way, your knee will get ground into the ground and you get stuck on your knee and if it's a little bit too far over this way, you get stuck on your ankle. You want it about there. I mean it varies a little bit from person to person but basically that is optimum for most people. As you come up, be deliberate about where you put your foot. As you come up, pay attention to the direction of this foot and with a little bit of practice, you can chose the direction that you want to get up into.

That's getting up. Getting down is the bit that -- well, shall we say the potential for injury is highest. So what we do is we start already on the floor. You don't learn to fall by standing on a table and jumping off. You learn to fall by getting your weight as close to the ground as possible and then because you're going to need your arms for fight-y stuff, cross them over your chest so they're not in the way and your elbows are tucked in so they can't whack into the ground and from there, you just lie down on your side and get back up again and lie down on your other side and get back up again. The trick is no pain. If it hurts, stop. You're doing something wrong. Back home in Helsinki, we do this at the beginning of every beginner's course on a smooth concrete floor and we get no injuries because there's no impact.

Once this is comfortable, bring your weight up a little bit and try it from here. You might even find it easier because the momentum you get going down is available for coming back up again. Once you can do it from here, bring up a foot. Now my weight's at the same height so the forces are about the same but I have a leg in the way and you need to be able to fall on both sides of your lead leg. For most people, falling on the side of a back leg is easier. Falling on the side of the lead leg requires you to get it to the ground and it's at that bit where the problems start. The trick to it is to get the leg to go down sideways all in one piece like that. Of course you have to do it both sides in both directions. From here just bring the weight up a bit and suddenly you're in a kind of Fiore longsword position and falling is easy and so is getting back up.

For some students it takes them ten minutes to get from this position to this position. Other students, ten months. It doesn't matter how long it takes, it matters that you remember no pain. If it hurts, stop. You're doing it wrong because there's this stuff of martial arty macho bullshit thing where you kind of muscle through the pain and blah, blah, blah and in very specific contexts, that's useful but in this, it's not particularly because if your experience of the going to the ground hurts, you learn to flinch and if you flinch on your way to the ground, you are much more likely to injure yourself. So your relationship to the ground should be comfortable.

Falling of your own volition is one thing. Being thrown by somebody when you're trying to not fall is something else altogether and there is path we can take from one to the other and it begins with simply having somebody else chose the direction and the timing of your fall but there's no actual mechanical intervention. So for this, I will need an assistant. This is Curtis who has very kindly volunteered to help me out today. Hello, Curtis.

Curtis Fee:

Hello, Guy.

Guy Windsor:

What Curtis is going to do when I've found the height that I want to practice that, let's say -- I'll pick this one just because -- Curtis is just going to give me a little push in any direction and that tells me where and when to fall and of course, because he's a nice chap, he is going to make sure that there isn't broken bottles or somebody else training or whatever in the direction that I'm going to fall. So in a safe direction your partner just gives you the impetus to fall and you work up to this until -- oh, I wasn't expecting that. Good. Right, you work up to it until you're comfortable falling in whatever direction at the height that you're training at. Then of course, you go a bit higher and you work it all the way up until you're quite comfortable standing with your center of gravity as high as it ever gets off the ground and somebody comes along, gives you a little push, and you get to the ground and back up and it's no big deal. That's the beginnings of falling. Thank you very much. I hope you've enjoyed it and remember no pain. See you on the next video. Bye, bye.

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