

Facing Couples Rule and Ocean Wave Rule

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English Abstract

The article describes the two rules and their typical as well as other possible applications. As it turns out, the Facing Couples Rule is most of the time only used for *Swing Thru*.

The article tries to motivate the usage of the Ocean Wave Rule only when the dancers are anyway moving towards each other, not from a standing wave. This is especially important when the follow-up call uses hand contact.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die beiden wichtigen Regeln werden kurz besprochen und ihre typischen, aber auch weitere möglichen Anwendungen vorgestellt. Bei der Facing-Couples-Rule zeigt sich, dass in der Praxis fast ausschließlich *Swing Thru* verwendet wird.

Der Artikel ist unter anderem ein Plädoyer dafür, die

Ocean-Wave-Rule nur dann anzuwenden, wenn die Tänzer im Fluss auf einander zulaufen, nicht aber aus einer stehenden Wave – besonders, wenn der Folgecall Handkontakt benötigt.

Focus

This article makes suggestions about the usage of two rules in modern square dancing. The reader should be a square dance caller and familiar with the established square dance theory and terms such as *FASR* or *get-out*.

Before we start, I first of all have to admit that I have a strong tendency to confuse these two rules. I try to remember that the name reflects the change – i.e. it names the formation from where the dancers perform a call that otherwise would be done from another formation.

- Facing Couples Rule: Dancers work from facing couples instead from ocean waves.
- Ocean Wave Rule: Dancers work from ocean waves instead from facing couples.

We learned the rules as very basic laws in square dancing, but a closer look shows that they actually only occur in quite limited situations. Let us start with the Facing Couples Rule.

Facing Couples Rule

As we just said, this rule has facing couples perform a call that is usually done from a wave. Wherever you read about it, you will find very vague statements about the calls that allow it. I wonder why, as in Mainstream it all burns down to the following list of six possibilities:

- *Swing Thru*
- *Left Swing Thru*
- *Spin the Top*
- *Left Spin the Top*
- *Spin Chain Thru*
- *Left Spin Chain Thru*

Let's have a look on all of these possibilities.

Swing Thru

This call is by far the one with the most frequent usage – I guess that *Swing Thru* from an eight chain thru formation [B] alone makes far more than 95 percent of the rule's applications. Therefore every graduated dancer has to know it very well, and it must be well planned as part of the teaching process. I think it is actually a quite natural process

to lead a class within weeks from *Dosado Once and a Quarter over Dosado to a Wave* and *Step to a Wave* finally to the introduction of *Swing Thru* from facing couples. At this place I also use to mention the term 'Facing Couples Rule' although I do not think that Mainstream dancers really have to know it.

Most callers know the following get-out from a zero box:

- Zero Box: *Swing Thru – Boys Trade, Girls Circulate – Right and Left Grand*

As a variant, *Girls Circulate* can be replaced by *All Eight Half Circulate*. – The routine includes both the Facing Couples Rule and the Ocean Wave Rule. If we want to use it from a half sashayed arrangement, we could try the following variant:

- Zero Box: *Right and Left Thru, and Roll Away – Swing Thru – Girls Trade, Boys Circulate – Wrong Way Grand – On Your Third Hand Swing and Promenade (or: On Your Fourth Hand Allemande Left)*

Again, we might replace *Boys Circulate* by *All Eight Half Circulate*.

Left Swing Thru

It takes usually at least a month in class until right hand waves are understood and fully internalized so that we can proceed to left hand waves. I use just the same process here, and again I do not introduce *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples before the call is fully mastered from left hand waves. I regard this application of the rule as part of what the dancers should know before graduation as in my calling I also use *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples quite a lot – but only if the hand availability supports it, or better: enforces it. Here are some examples:

- [F] *Ferris Wheel – Centers Square Thru Three – Left Swing Thru*
- [S] *Heads Pass the Ocean – Turn Thru – Left Swing Thru*

Similar to the well-known get out that I mentioned as the first example of this article, I tried to find a variant that includes *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples:

- Zero Box: *Left Swing Thru – Girls Trade, Boys Circulate – Do Paso*

It is not exactly easy, as the dancers must be used both to *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples and *Do Paso*. (I am happy to say that it worked in my group.)

Swing Thru from Facing Lines

We can easily verify that the every day usage of the Facing Couples Rule is quite limited if we try it from facing lines. Many dancers master *Swing Thru* only from waves and boxes; from infacing lines they strongly tend to confuse it with *Pass the Ocean*. Therefore it seems important to practice this – as well as *Pass the Ocean* from a box. Here are two easy get outs:

- Zero Lines: *Swing Thru – Boys Run – Lead Right – Wrong Way Promenade Home*
- Zero Lines out of Sequence: *Swing Thru – Spin the Top – Boys Run – Promenade Home*

And similarly, making use of *Left Swing Thru*:

- Zero Lines out of Sequence: *Left Swing Thru – Girls Run – Lead Left, and Promenade Home*
- Zero Lines: *Left Swing Thru – Spin the Top – Girls Run – Wrong Way Promenade Home*

I think the knowledge of *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples is quite important as left hand waves add a lot to Mainstream – apparently *Left Swing Thru* is technically not any more difficult than *Swing Thru*, it is only less practiced. I certainly would not expect this from an unknown group but consider it as important for my 'own' dancers.

We just stated that *(Left) Swing Thru* from lines is much less known than from boxes; apparently, exactly the same is true for *Heads Swing Thru* from a static square.

Spin the Top

The Facing Couples Rule also includes *Spin the Top*. This is by far less common than *Swing Thru* and can usually not be expected from an unknown group. If I personally have to decide to teach either this or the *Left Swing Thru* application of the rule (say, when time frame is tight, not allowing to teach both before graduation), I will go for the latter, because of my well-known political mission for the *left hand* formations.

Again we can say that mastering *Spin the Top* from a box does not automatically include mastering it from infacing lines or from a static square (in this case either for heads or sides). But as *Spin the Top* is certainly legal from [B], [L] and [S], and as it is technically not any more difficult than *Swing Thru*, it is again just a question of practice, both for the dancers and for the caller.

Left Spin the Top

This term should mean *Step to a Left Hand Wave, and Spin the Top*. It can only be called from facing couples. Sometimes callers say **Left Spin the Top* from a left hand wave; as *Spin the Top* is a call that does not draw on right and left hands but on centers and ends, this terminology is obviously wrong. Even more – as it suggests thinking of left and right it might lead to the dancers' wrong understanding of the call; therefore it must be avoided under all circumstances – even in a tidal wave where you might feel like wanting to give a little help.

A view on the definitions: '...unless the caller specifically directs a left hand call (e.g. left swing thru, etc.) in which case the dancers step into a momentary left hand ocean wave and complete the call.' From the words in brackets we can clearly deduce that there must be at least one more left hand call – and *Left Spin the Top* and *Left Spin Chain Thru* seem the only possibilities. Nevertheless, from the insight that *Spin the Top* does not know right and left hands, some callers argue that the usage of the modifier 'left' should completely be forbidden with *Spin the Top*, even from facing couples. So they want us to always call *Step to a Left Hand Wave and Spin the Top*.

Being convinced that I understand the reasons quite well, I want to recall that the word 'Left' in *Left Swing Thru* from facing couples has actually two distinct implications: It means first of all to go to a left hand wave and then to *Left Swing Thru*. If it did not have the first meaning, it could also be understood as **Step to a Right Hand Wave and Left Swing Thru*. So the first thing the word 'Left' does is

giving an initial signal to the dancer to go to a left hand wave. And in this sense it is perfectly what we want if we say *Left Spin the Top* from facing couples.

I think we all agree on the advantages and usefulness to be able to have facing dancers stepping to a left hand wave and starting a *Spin the Top*. So we actually simply need to agree on an appropriate wording. I have heard a lot of suggestions from callers – here is a selection:

- *Starting with Your Left Hand, Spin the Top*
- *With Your Left Hand Spin the Top*
- *With the Left, Spin the Top*
- *Left Handed (Left Hand) Spin the Top*
- *Starting Left, Spin the Top*
- *Left Spin the Top*

Every caller might have his own preferences, but I frankly admit to have a little bit difficulty to see the big differences here. This article concentrates on examining choreographic possibilities rather than on standardization of wordings, so I think we can leave the topic at this point. Most important to me is the idea to take left hand waves as serious as right hand waves, as I am convinced they are an important tool to help keeping the Mainstream level interesting and alive.

Spin Chain Thru, Left Spin Chain Thru

As *Spin Chain Thru* starts exactly like *Spin the Top* it is obvious that all what was said above also applies here, both for right and left hand waves. Remember that we are not discussing the question if a call is well known to your particular dancer group – it certainly should, as *Spin Chain Thru* has been part of Mainstream for quite some time now.

Other Calls

No, there are no further possibilities – not in Mainstream! None. Zero. Nada. Zip. Zilch.

Often enough, less experienced callers try it e.g. with *Recycle* or *Circulate*. But *Circulate* shows quite clearly why this cannot be: The circulate path is different from facing couples and from waves. In case of *Recycle* I was informed that this would collide with other definitions of the call in higher levels. Any way, both are excluded explicitly in the definitions.

And this was done with good reasons: If we take a closer look on all applications of the Facing Couples Rule (both in Mainstream and Plus) we will realize that they all start with a hand turn. This action is natural and easy and has a good and expected flow both from facing dancers and from waves (only *Fan the Top* is a bit tricky as the turn is done with the other hand). Any other usages would go against dancer expectation and raise unnecessary difficulties – what prevents us from saying *Step to a Wave* before? Omitting this sentence adds a difficulty that seems both unnecessary and unmotivated.

In any case we can be sure that at least some of the dancers will hesitate, which immediately will undermine a fluent dancing. So let us keep it as it is and stick with the possibilities listed.

Box the Gnat

Another aspect is the call immediately before the application of the Facing Couples Rule. *Box the Gnat* is a bit special, as most dancers would not expect a *Swing Thru* or *Spin the Top* after it, despite the fact that they are already holding hands. I think in a way it offers a fresh access to an ocean wave. (Note here that the body flow limits the choice of the next call; *Fan the Top* would perhaps be the best choice).

A caller might also want to say *Box the Gnat to a Wave* to make clearer what happens – but this obviously leaves the focus of the Facing Couples Rule.

Ocean Wave Rule

The Ocean Wave Rule is the opposite of what we were talking about so far: It allows performing calls from an ocean wave as a substitute for facing couples. When considering the applications of this rule, two completely different scenarios come to my inner eye.

- Picture one, singing call: *...Spin the Top, the Boys Move Up, Right and Left Thru, Square Thru Three, Swing That Girls Around and Promenade*. Or, in another figure: *Spin the Top, Slide Thru, Swing this Girl and Promenade*.
- Picture two, pattern: After a *Swing Thru* the caller lowers the music and explains us that al-

though we are in waves we must understand that at the same time we can see us as facing dancers. He asks us to take a step back. Now we see the facing dancers! He says *Square Thru Three*.

A non-dancer would never be able to see any relationship between the two scenarios. In the first example, we have fluent dance, the second case is just stop and go. But if the caller has to stop the dance action and to ask us to step back to see something only he can see, then there is something essentially wrong to me. This is not dancing, and this is not the kind of action that attracted me when

I decided to join a class!

Frankly, I personally never use this kind of routine. I use the Ocean Wave Rule only if the dancers are moving towards each other and can immediately go into the second call, blending them into each other without interruption. It is too late if the ocean wave is already standing – the next call must be heard and understood early enough so that the dancers do not even find time to take the wave handhold. I even consider the term Ocean Wave Rule as misleading, if not plain wrong.

Swing Thru or *Centers Trade* are generally no good preceding calls if the next call will involve hand grabbing – the centers come somewhat from the side and will often tend to draw the ends into the wrong direction. The worst combination is to have them followed by *Turn Thru* as this call is not well known, and one confused dancer is usually enough to also let one or two others lose orientation, ending somewhere in outer space.

Although it might occasionally make sense to show the dancers by 'stepping back and watching' what we mean, it is usually far better to regard the two blending calls as one unit. This means we should even explain them together: 'I will now call *Spin the Top and Right and Left Thru*. In the end of the *Spin the Top* you will all face the wall that is now left from you (take a look at it!) and meet the person you have now at your right hand. You will immediately pull this person by, going straightforward and do the *Courtesy Turn* with somebody else. Again: If you all face left, you will see the direction in which you be going during the *Right Pull By*. So let's do this slowly: *Ready – Steady – Spin Chain Thru – Right Pull By*'.

I made the experience that this practice will have a much better result than the 'step back and watch' routine – the difficulty is the **blending** of the calls, and we cannot practice this difficulty by stopping the dancers at this point. Even more – I am convinced that stopping here is the worst thing we can do because what we in fact are doing here is not practicing but preventing the dancers from learning.

Of course the next step must be to bring the dancers to the same spot and repeat it in normal tempo until it works, and then step by step from every possible spot. The concentrated study of the routines *Spin the Top and Right and Left Thru* and *Spin the Top and Slide Thru* must be an integral part of every Mainstream class that considers itself complete – these two combinations are by far the most frequent ones.

Usage From Right Hand Waves

We now want to take a closer look on the application when the dancers move towards each other, expecting to pass right shoulders. We will first have a look at the calls that can precede the Ocean

Wave Rule – here is my list:

- *Spin the Top*
- *Extend*
- *Ends Circulate*
- *Ends Trade*
- *Scoot Back*
- *All Eight Circulate*
- *Pass the Ocean*
- *(Swing Thru)*
- *(Centers Trade)*
- *(Spin Chain Thru)*

Note that the calls *Run* and *Cross Run* are not listed – in Mainstream where adjustment is always built-in, it will usually be better to replace them by *Fold* and *Cross Fold*, thus evading the need of the Ocean Wave Rule.

What calls now are appropriate to follow after the ones listed? – I distinguish two groups, depending if the dancers grab hands or not. I will start with calls of the first type (if you want so, the *Pass Thru* type), which I think is always appropriate:

Pass Thru: I personally prefer *Step Thru*, which does not unnecessarily make use of the Ocean Wave Rule.

Double Pass Thru: Of course, this is possible from a quarter tag formation only.

Pass to the Center: Fine, but remember that you must immediately call something for the new centers. Good timing is not easy here (and even more important than after *Pass Thru*).

Dosado: Instead, we can say *Finish Your Dosado*, and will again not need the Ocean Wave Rule at all. Note that C level dancers might expect something different when they hear *Finish*; I personally do not care in this case. But for many groups, the *Finish* is not necessary. It astonishes me that *Swing Thru* and *(Finish Your) Dosado* is not used more often, considering that flows very well.

Walk Around Your Corner and Swing: Apparently, only usable in the solution process, with the (original, or in singing calls, the 'targeted') corner or partner respectively. I never encountered *Walk Around Your Corner* outside of the ring formations but it is easy and feels fresh and unexpected.

All the calls so far flow well after any of the 'Preceding Calls' listed. But here are some more calls that need hand grabbing – after the calls in brackets (such as *Swing Thru* or *Centers Trade*) I personally do not encourage their use:

Square Thru any number of hands

Box The Gnat – strange to observe that weak dancers usually have no idea where to look after this!

Right and Left Thru and **Eight Chain Thru** (both apparently limited to [0] arrangement; the second

even to [OB].)

Right and Left Grand / Wrong Way Grand: Again only in the solution process, with everybody in sequence.

Turn Thru: This is the most difficult follow-up call. One problem is the usage of arm instead of hand; the other one is again the uncertainty of many dancers about the facing direction afterwards.

Spin Chain Thru

The usage of the Ocean wave Rule after *Spin Chain Thru* needs perhaps a closer look. Again, the question is if the dancers move towards each other (as in *Spin the Top*) or not. As the *Turn* of the centers apparently is the last dance action, it seems sensitive to treat it just like *Swing Thru* or *Centers Trade* – in other words, the call does not encourage a hand usage afterwards. But at this point you will probably object that most of the time it is combined with *Ends Circulate*. Doesn't this mean we have a good ending flow, with dancers moving towards each other?

The truth is that for this effect the timing would have to be perfect. Usually the ends finish their *Circulate* much too early and will already be standing pat when the centers eventually arrive. The Callerlab timing indications tell us that the ends do their arm turns and then will be standing fixed to the ground for no less than twelve beats! So we have an intricate situation if we want to make use of the initial 'moving up' impulse, keeping the ends in motion, but at the same time want to end their movement at the same time with the centers. As *Circulate* takes just four beats, an academic solution might be to call *Spin Chain Thru – the Ends Circulate Three Times*. But I still doubt that Callerlab's timing indications are correct enough to guarantee the desired flow. And I am also not sure if dancers like any call being done three times in a row.

Usage From Left Hand Waves

This application of the rule is much less common than from right hand waves – partly due to the simple fact that left hand waves are anyway much less used than people would think. If we want to try it, the most important question is what we can call afterwards. A drawback is that apparently there are not many possibilities:

Left Shoulder Dosado: This is certainly not bad; see remark on *Dosado* above.

Left Square Thru: I have seen a very experienced caller needing an entire tip to teach *Spin the Top* and *Left Square Thru*. Apparently, it is not exactly easy: After the three quarter turn by the right, somebody offers the left hand – many dancers do not

expect here that they still have to go to the right, especially if the other dancer did not drop the hand in time. I am convinced that this is the most rewarding usage of the rule from a left hand wave but it will need good dancers, and it will need to be practiced.

Left Turn Thru has the disadvantages mentioned with *Turn Thru* (above)

Allemande Left and Do Paso are both only possible within the solution process but could certainly make up for interesting get-outs.

Note that a left hand wave does not allow *Pass Thru*. Use *Step Thru* instead (which actually also works from a right hand wave).

Pass the Ocean from a Wave?

Sometimes callers think it might be really kewl to call *Pass the Ocean* from a right hand wave. They try it, and their dancers have difficulties, as the resulting moves are not at all intuitive and certainly not easy to see. Ask any experienced caller, and you will hear that this is 'illegal', but the question why is usually met by a hint to the definition which says 'facing couples only'.

It is interesting to see that no one can actually name a real reason. Instead, people usually get very angry if we insist. The usual answer is a self-reflexive hint to the definition: It is not allowed because it is forbidden. So the reason for the prohibition is the interdiction... This seems to be enough for almost everyone, and this fact tells a lot about the psychology of square dance calling, and its hierarchy focused structure with its obsession of authorities.

But perhaps we can understand the reasons when we analyze the resulting flow. It is apparently very similar to *Fan the Top*, with one difference: *Fan the Top* has the centers cast off 3/4 and the ends move up. *Pass the Ocean* would mean the centers to hinge and the ends to move up. Apparently, *Fan the Top* is accepted and works very well, but how on earth can it be that one is considered ok and frequently used as a call, and the other one is banned?

I think this comparison shows that the timing of the centers versus ends does not match. If we called *Pass the Ocean* from a standing wave, the centers would have a tendency to be too fast and meet the ends somewhere on their ways with an unsure result. As the Ocean Wave Rule is apparently most of the time used for mind puzzles (instead of the fluent way sketched above), it seems not a bad idea to try to save at least one call from its misuse.

It is likely that the wording 'facing couples only' was put into the definitions 40 years ago, long before the Ocean Wave Rule came into effect, and has never

been adjusted with the times. It is striking that the draft of the new definition draft replaces the interdiction by the sentence 'The application of the Ocean Wave Rule to this call is rarely encountered in Mainstream'.

I personally did not miss *Pass the Ocean* from a right hand wave so far; if I wanted the action, I could consider saying *Centers Hinge, Ends Move Up* (which, by the way, is also defined in the A1 program under the name *Lock It*).

What For?

Why should a caller make use of the intricacies of the two rules? And most of all, why the hell should he try to use them from left hand waves?

Both rules are usually only applied in very few and very standardized cases, although they offer much more possibilities – and these possibilities are only less practiced, not technically more difficult. Needless to say that the caller needs judgment to make use of these possibilities, and that he must always be prepared to immediately teach a particular sequence if it does not work. But doing so, he will help the Mainstream program to display its inherent beauties and challenges and might well prevent dancers to rush to higher levels. I am convinced that this aspect cannot be overestimated. And left hand waves are a perfect means to add the feeling of completeness to the Mainstream level as a whole and to test and train the dancers' abstraction capabilities as well as their geometrical awareness. It is as important as a full usage of all arrangements to allow dancers to learn all possible roles that a call

has to offer.

If brought forward with the necessary ease and fluency, the feeling will never be like squeezing everything possible from an exhausted and innocent call, which we all have often been exposed to in endless workshops. Instead, the dancers should feel like recovering the inherent richness and freshness a call has to offer. If introduced and used well, the dancers can learn a lot that is useful even in completely different calls, as it trains the geometrical awareness as well as the overall sureness and confidence in the ending formation of a call. It both will help to convince them that Mainstream has enough to offer to be worth to stick with it for some time stick, as well as prepare them for the next higher level.

The academic now-all-step-back-see-what-I-see boredom can easily be replaced by an approach like 'Now I will challenge us all with an All Eight Circulate and Square Thru – will that frighten you? Sure not? Then let us see if we can make it!'

Colophon

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Who Are My Readers?

I got some response in the beginning when I started my site but much less in the recent year. Of course I ask myself if what I write can be of any use for somebody else. So I invite you to let me know that you read the article and tell if you did find anything in it that can be of use to you. By writing even a short email, you actually help convincing me of the sense to write an essay like this and motivating me to go on.

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