

THROWING

THE FIFTY SIX POUND WEIGHT

by Malcolm W. Ford



PREPARATORY TO SWING.

THROWING the fifty-six pound weight is a very heavy game, and an athlete must have a great deal of brute strength and weight before he can become a successful performer at it. The missile generally consists of an iron or lead sphere eight or nine inches in diameter, with a staple, to which a handle is attached. The handle may be triangular, pear or circular in shape, but the whole implement, with the handle extended, must not be over sixteen inches long. It is limited to this length because the longer the handle

is, just so much further the weight can be thrown with a certain effort. The handles vary in thickness from one-quarter to three-quarters of an inch in diameter. Those of the small diameter are generally wrapped at the grip with a cord, bringing the total size up to about half an inch; but most athletes prefer one even larger than that, and about five-eighths of an inch in diameter is the usual size. If the handle is too small at the grip, it is apt to cut the hand, for fifty-six pounds is a very heavy weight to swing from the fingers.

Throwing the fifty-six pound weight is practiced quite differently in various countries, but at one time one universal style of throwing was prevalent. The game originated in Great Britain, and an ordinary one-half hundredweight was used. These weights, which are found in

all country stores in Great Britain, are of different shapes, but that most common is square and a little conical. Its base may be eight inches square and its top may be five inches square. The depth is between six and seven inches, and on the top is a staple, to which a ring is attached.

This ring is for convenience in handling the weight when weighing merchandise on the scales, and is not adapted for a good grip, which is necessary when the weight is taken from its daily duties and used as an athletic missile. It is no wonder, then, that evolution has worked changes, and the small lead ball with the long handle now used by the modern athlete is most unlike the old-fashioned, sharp-cornered and small-handled fifty-six pound weight.

Throwing the fifty-six pound weight, like throwing the hammer, was originally done by the athlete standing still; but when the rule was changed in 1888, calling for all weights to be thrown from a seven-foot circle, athletes commenced using a run for the "fifty-six" as well as for the hammer and shot. To run or turn with such a heavy weight in the hand comes very hard to one who has never tried it, for it is as much as most men can do to stand still, swing the weight a little and throw it twelve or fourteen feet. The game takes much more strength than the hammer and shot, and one reason why there are so few good performers with the fifty-six pound weight is that only a large, powerful man has the required strength or force.

In throwing the weight with two hands, the athlete stands as shown in the illustration "Preparatory to Swing." This picture shows how the grip is, for the handle in this case is wide enough to allow both hands to be put side by side. In case the handle is not wide

enough to allow all the fingers side by side, one or two fingers can be left off from one or both hands to suit the athlete. The same kind of a circle is used as was described in throwing the hammer, and the athlete stands in the same position, relative to the direction to which the missile is thrown, as in the hammer. The only difference between throwing this weight with two hands and throwing the hammer is that the swing for the "fifty-six" is much slower



AN AWKWARD SIDE THROW.

than that used in the other. The same fine points as those mentioned in the article on that game must be remembered in throwing the "fifty-six," although the athlete may feel much freer while practicing the heavier game, so far as striking the ground is concerned, for the handle is too short to enable the weight to touch the ground if a proper swing is used. The weights are generally arranged so that the handles are easily detachable, on account of some athletes wishing to use their own handles. The only objection to this is that a sphere weighing fifty-six pounds with one handle might weigh but fifty-four or fifty-five pounds with a lighter one,

The first movement to make with the fifty-six pound weight, preparatory to the swing, is shown in "The First Movement," where the weight has been thrown around back past the right leg as far as possible. From there it is carried up over and around the head, the

same as in throwing the hammer, and "In Full Swing" will show the weight when it is above the head before a turn of the body has been made. In place of swinging the missile around the head three or four times before commencing the turn, as is generally the case in throwing the hammer, one complete swing is enough; for if too much speed is put to this weight at first, it is so heavy that it is apt to take the athlete off his feet. The swing must be made in a very steady way, and speed given the weight only at a point, just before the delivery, where the motion will be to lower the weight, the athlete by this time having traveled to the front part of the circle and standing instantaneously with his back toward where he intends to throw the missile. The weight is now in a position to be given the vigorous upward heave which is necessary to cause it to travel any considerable distance, and the athlete accomplishing this by an upward movement of his legs, back and arms, turns at the same time, and letting go the weight will resemble "After the Delivery," where it will be seen



THE FIRST MOVEMENT.

he has followed the weight up as far as he can with uplifted arms and yet maintained his balance to prevent his falling out of the circle.

Attention is called to the illustration "A Wrong Swing," and by comparing it with "In Full Swing," the reader can easily note the difference. It will be seen that in "A Wrong Swing" the athlete is giving the weight more of an up-and-down swing in front of him than should

be the case. The weight in "In Full Swing" is being given a more circular motion around the head, and in this style there will not be the jerking of the arms, for there is no downward tendency of the weight, that cannot fail to be the case in "A Wrong Swing." It takes considerable practice before an athlete can swing this weight slowly and evenly

would be better than two, but it is such a heavy mass to hurl that the best athletes use two arms, which up to two years ago had always been the style. In throwing with two hands, some athletes prefer gripping the handle and holding the weight so that the right hand is in front of the left, both describing a line at right angles to the body; but some



SLIPPED FROM THE HAND.

around the head, but the ability to do this is bound to come in time, providing the athlete does not strain himself in endeavoring to learn it too quickly.

If the weight is thrown with one hand from a seven-foot circle, nearly the same movements are used as have been just described when thrown with two hands, and about the only difference there is, is right at the beginning of the swing; for the athlete, when throwing with one hand, if it is the right one, stands with his left side toward the direction in which the weight will be thrown, in place of putting his back to it.

The main difficulty in throwing with two hands, compared with one hand, is that in the latter way a smoother swing can be obtained; but so much more power can be used with two arms that the cramped swing is more than offset. If the weight were lighter, one arm

prefer to hold the weight with the hands side by side, parallel with the body. This is merely a matter of taste.

If throwing the fifty-six pound weight is to be engaged in simply for exercise, a very good way to throw it is the old-fashioned way, from a stand. This consists of standing with the right or left side at a mark and holding the weight with the hand nearest the mark. Then swing the weight gently, putting no force into it until ready to deliver it, which consists of bending the knees, when the weight has been swung well past the body, toward the side opposite to where it is to be sent. A quick lift with the arm and legs will put considerable impetus into the weight, and then the athlete continues with that momentum as far as he can reach. This style is a little awkward at first, for most athletes will prefer to throw the weight

with the arm opposite to the direction of the throwing. The style I have just described is called "throwing from the side." but it gives many the impression of the weight being thrown backwards. A vigorous lift with the legs is necessary in this side-throw, and care must



IN FULL SWING.

be taken not to hit the knee nearest the line with the weight as it passes.

The illustration "Position for Side-throw" shows C.A.J. Queckberner standing preparatory to beginning a swing for that style of throwing. His side-throw was famous, and he had no equal at it. For half a dozen years he held the best record of this country at that style. His best figures are 26 feet $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, but they were beaten by J. S. Mitchell, who, at the Canadian championship games of 1884, stood at a mark, swung the weight with one hand once around his head, and delivered it without moving his feet, sending it 27 feet 4 inches. The side-throw is probably the best-known style in professional athletic circles, but it has been replaced among amateurs by the around-the-head swing, which is considered to be the best way for throwing the weight with a seven-foot run.

The illustration "Awkward Side-throw" shows an athlete in the act of using that style, but he evidently did not know how to get his full power under the weight, for his back and elbow are bent, which should not be the case when the weight is no further advanced than the illustration shows. The great beauty of the side-throw is the ability to get a long, straight swing, and to put plenty of force into it by bending the

legs and raising them quickly on the final swing, giving the whole body an upward movement, which, combined with the arm swing, will send the weight a remarkable distance for a standing throw. The style cannot be used to advantage with a run, but it is perfection for throwing from a stand.

Another way of throwing the fifty-six pound weight is what is called "between the legs." The athlete toes a line and swings the weight between his feet, throwing it in front. This style is very good for developing the back for ordinary feats of lifting; but in throwing the weight the athlete must take care not to hold the feet too far apart, for injury to the hip or abdominal muscles might ensue. The feet should be held parallel to each other, not over twelve or fourteen inches apart, measured inside. This may seem like a small distance for the weight to pass through, but with a little practice a true swing can be obtained and there will be no danger of hitting the ankles. Commence throwing in this style by swinging the weight gently to and fro through the legs, resting the hand not used in throwing, on the knee to give additional



A WRONG SWING.

support to the back. When in the act of delivering, swing the weight far back and underneath, and then raise and swing the weight out with as much force as possible. The motions should not be jerky, and there is no use in endeavoring to send the weight out quicker than it

may go with you, for it is just as uncontrollable in the between-the-legs style as in any other way of throwing it.

Throwing between the legs is the



AFTER THE DELIVERY.

favorite style in Ireland., but it never took in Scotland or America. It is considered to be an absolutely fair way of delivering the weight from a stand, for, as can be imagined, there is no inclination to move either foot in the slightest way. In all other styles of standing throwing there is a tendency to lift and take a little jump with one foot to give extra momentum to the body, and these movements cause more or less dispute; but I have never yet seen a dispute arise concerning the fairness of a standing throw between the legs with even the most fault-finding competitors and the most inexperienced judges.

Another form of competition with the fifty-six pound weight is shown in the illustration "Throwing for Height." There are two ways of practicing this game. One is to throw the missile over a bar, like in high jumping or pole-vaulting, and the other is to hit a disk or tambourine, as in a high kick. The records at these two styles are quite far apart, for in one case the whole weight has to clear the bar, while in the other the sphere of the weight may not be within 6 or 9 inches of the tambourine, but from some twist the handle will be snapped up and just touch the object aimed at. J. S. Mitchell holds the record at both styles. He threw over a

bar 13 feet and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch high in Ireland on October 8, 1887, and in this country, on April 12, 1890, he hit a disk 15 feet 2 inches high. That shows a difference of about 2 feet in the styles by the same man, although this athlete has expressed the opinion that he can throw the weight over a bar 14 feet high.

His style at this game is perfection. When he made his world's record he stood almost directly underneath the wooden disk, which was about two feet in diameter. A perpendicular line from the middle of this would probably have touched the ground about one foot in front of his toes. He gave the weight a slight preparatory swing between his legs, and just before making the delivery he bent his knees, lowered his back, the weight at the same time swinging far in underneath him, and then he lifted simultaneously with his



C. A. J. QUECKBERNER IN POSITION FOR SIDE-THROW.

knees, back and arm, and the weight went up as though it were a toy. This record is remarkable, for plenty of athletes who practice throwing the "fifty-six," both for distance and height, cannot raise it over nine feet in the air.

The illustration "Slipped from the Hand" shows a peculiar result of an accident. The athlete, in rising for the delivery to throw the weight over the bar, used too much force for his grip, and the missile pulled through his fingers, going off in front, while he, being suddenly let loose from his load, fell over backward, knocking one of the uprights and the bar down. If an unwary official had been standing in front he would have had to do some quick dodging to get out of the way of the weight.

I have often been asked how it is possible for a comparatively light man to throw the 56-pound weight. The best answer to this is that a really light man has no earthly chance of making a record at this game. He may throw the weight a good distance in proportion to his own avoirdupois, but his figures, compared with those of a strong man who may weigh 100 pounds more than he, will look very meager. The average athlete weighs 140 pounds, or a little under, and if only runners were spoken of, the weight would be about 10 pounds less. Such men can only hope to throw the 56-pound weight for amusement, for the best men in this country to-day are Mitchell, Queckberner and Coughlan, who will average 220 pounds in weight. It does not necessarily follow that because a man is heavy he will throw the 56-pound weight well, for heavy men, as a rule, are very soft unless they take a great deal of exercise, and even then few of this class display the strength in proportion to their weight that medium-weight and more compactly built athletes do. Take, for instance, the case of Daniel Long, who, during the summer of 1890, weighed 172 pounds in athletic dress, and yet he managed to do on one day over 29 feet for the 56-pound weight, and 5 feet 10¹/₂ inches for the running high jump. Queckberner, who weighed 50 pounds more, beat him something over 1 foot in throwing the "56," and yet if one should judge by the looks of the two men, the impression could hardly fail to be given that Queckberner ought to "lose" Long at this game. Long was a wiry, well-knit and compactly built athlete, standing about 5 feet 10 inches high. Queckberner's physique is too well known to need much mention, but his and Long's performances on that day

showed conclusively that Queckberner's "draught-horse" build is not very mighty in proportion to the bulk it represents.

A man who weighs 140 pounds is doing a good performance if he gets the 56-pound weight from a stand over 17 feet. When he first picks the weight up, 14 or 15 feet will be a good performance. These were my figures when I first handled the weight in 1885, but a little practice enabled me to throw it from a stand over 18 feet, and the following year I threw it in the same style over 20 feet. Later on, when the running style became prevalent, I could send it over 22 feet, but I think that had I practiced the game much I should be able to do 25 feet with my own avoirdupois at 160 pounds, for the running style came easily to me on account of my strong lower limbs. A good example of improvement at the two-handed running style are A. A. Jordan's figures. He could do a little over 18 feet from a stand, but after acquiring the fine points of the running throw, he threw the good distance of 23 feet, which, for a man weighing under 155 pounds and not making a specialty of weight-throwing, is very good. His best record from a stand is about 2 feet below mine, but his running-throw record is 1 foot further than mine. However, I ceased taking an active part in athletics about the same time that the running throw was developed, and just the little I did of it convinced me that an athlete can send the weight considerably further in this way than from a stand. Jordan's records show a difference of 5 feet, while mine happen to be only 2 feet apart. The difference between Mitchell's standing and running throws is 7 feet, and the same is the case with Queckberner. Their difference are considerably more than Jordan's on account of their throwing the weight considerably further, whichever style they use, and therefore producing a greater proportionate difference. M. O'Sullivan, who has a record of a few inches over 23 feet from a stand, has done 6 feet further with a run.

Improvement at throwing the 56-pound weight is necessarily slow, for it is a very heavy mass to control; but if an athlete has any strength at all in the upper part of his body he can, if he does not force himself too much, acquire a good easy swing, and after getting this,

the ability to send the weight a distance is only a matter of increased strength, which, like any other athletic game, can be acquired by practice. There is a great tendency in nearly all who practice throwing the 56-pound weight to overdo. It is such a heavy game that a little practice at it goes a great way. I have seen athletes become tired after making only two or three throws.

One point which must not be overlooked in practicing this game in any style, is the hardening of the palms of the hands. When first commencing handling the weight the palm may not be in condition to withstand the great pressure which the weight puts on it, and unless great care is used the skin will be pulled off, and practice must be stopped until the palms are in condition again. The athlete should not use rosin or Venice turpentine on his hands when first throwing this weight, for if too much swing is given in proportion to the strength of grip of the athlete's hands, it is much better to have the weight pull through the fingers easily than to hold a part of a second longer, and eventually leave with pieces of skin stuck to the handle. After the hands are hardened, which is bound to ensue by handling the weight, then Venice turpentine may be used with advantage,

for a judicious quantity of it will add a foot to a throw.

It is well occasionally to change the grip by shifting either to the palms from the ends of the fingers, or vice versa. In this way the whole space between the ends of the fingers and the palms becomes hardened, and the athlete can use whichever grip suits him best when one part becomes tired or sore from too much use. The matter of choosing a grip for eventually throwing in competition is not worth much thought, but the best throwers generally prefer a grip near the ends of the fingers, so as to get a longer swing.

J. S. Mitchell holds the best record at the two-handed running style delivery, for at Traver's Island, October 17, 1891, he threw the weight 34 feet 11 inches. He also holds the best record at throwing with one hand in the running style—30 feet 1 inch, New York City, November 6, 1888. His 27 feet 4 inches at throwing from a standstill is also the world's record. C. A. J. Queckberner comes next to Mitchell at the two-handed running style, with 33 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and he is also next at the standstill, with 26 feet $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Then follow C. Coughlan, W. L. Coudon, Daniel Long and M. O'Sullivan, with records at the running throw of over 28 feet.



THROWING FOR HEIGHT.