

WHAT MAKES SYEDIKH'S TECHNIQUE SO EFFECTIVE

By Harold Connolly, USA

Connolly, the 1956 Olympic champion in the hammer and a 7-time setter of the World Record, analyzes the effectiveness of the style of the USSR's Yuriy Syedikh. The 1976 and '80 Olympic hammer victor, Syedikh extended the World Record to 284-7/86.74 in 1986 and was voted the Track & Field News Athlete Of The Year.

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One immediate key to the success of Yuriy Syedikh's hammer style is that his body stays slightly ahead of the hammer. From about the moment his right foot lifts off to commence the first turn, his body leads the ball throughout the course of the throw.

After winding, the less-proficient thrower allows the hammer to significantly lead his mass and power. Even after the thrower has gone into the single-support phase, and the ball passes across the front into its upward path, the hammer leads the thrower's body.

As this thrower begins to drop into a right-foot landing—even though he may keep his eyes lined up with the ball—he goes into an equally-significant lead on the hammer until after his foot has landed and the hammer has come around to the front of the ring.

So how does Syedikh keep a constant lead, even if slight, on the hammer?

As the hammer descends from the high point of Syedikh's second wind, against the blocking of his right hip and leg (which efficiently and very stably speeds up the ball), he reaches out. He is bent forward a bit from the waist, with arms extended.

However, just before Yuriy's hammer reaches approximately 90 degrees, the great difference begins to unfold between his technique and that of most other throwers:

He dramatically straightens his lower back, which causes him to sit back against the pulling away of the hammer. This sets up a countering from the back of his neck and shoulders in a straight line, down his very straight arms to the hammer.

This countering with the shoulders and back of the head (with a straight back away from the pull of the hammer) is so pronounced, Syedikh is lifted to the point of his heel at takeoff. It causes him to lift his right foot up and over his lower left leg as he enters each turn.

This trademark feature of Syedikh's technique be-

comes even more pronounced with each succeeding turn as he accentuates his straight-back counter away from the pull of the hammer.

At the end of his throw, Syedikh is countering so much with his ramrod-straight back, as well as with his shoulders and the back of his head, that he falls backward the moment he releases the hammer, like a man falling off a cliff.

This key factor—the straight-back counter from 90 degrees on—makes throwing much easier, more consistent and much less traumatic on the lower back.

Once Syedikh enters the first turn, because of this consistent lead on the hammer throughout the entire orbit of all the turns, there is the clear impression of an exponentially—increasing speed to his throw. Other throwers appear to throw with an off-on/off-on acceleration of the implement—power off when the hammer leads the thrower, power on when the thrower leads the hammer.

The most obvious exponents of this inefficient off-on/off-on technique are those throwers who keep the upper back rounded forward and extended out. This results from an effort to get the largest radius possible, with the ball out and as far away from them as possible.

Then, in the last turn, such throwers—as they inevitably must in order to make any kind of decent throw—straighten the back into an efficient power position. But that effort usually is too little, too late. It is a tribute to the raw, explosive power of some throwers that they are able to power out a long throw every so often—even with this very inefficient technique.

At the same time, Syedikh consistently produces top throws year after year with an efficient, no-frills technique. Syedikh's style has remained basically unchanged during the decade of the 1980s. When Syedikh gets his strength, jumps and fitness where he wants them, his big throws are always there.