

## Dividing From a Springboard: part 2 – The Backward Approach

**Introduction** – Last time we discussed the classic 4-step forward approach for springboard diving. This article will describe the backward approach, also called the back take-off or press. This approach is used for backward and inward dives. As is true of the forward approach, there are variations in how this skill is performed. Divers need to establish a take-off that is comfortable and stays within the bounds of standard diving rules. Most divers use multiple oscillations of the board to establish a rhythm and gain some momentum prior to the final press and take-off. Here, we'll describe a 2 oscillation (or 2-part press) approach. That is, two oscillations prior to the press and arm swing. Although this may be the most common backward approach, there is plenty of variation out there.

**Terms** – There are a couple of terms to learn before we get into the details of the approach. First is *excessive oscillation*. This refers to moving the board up and down more times than the rules will allow. In general, oscillations should not exceed 4; but we see some divers perform more. I don't recommend doing more than 4, because you could be docked by the judges, and it may be easier to get off balance and crash. Another term is *crow hop* which refers to your feet losing contact with the board during the oscillations. Here again, crow hops are sometimes seen in competition; but are not recommended as part of your approach. They too, could result in docking of your score, and loss of balance/footing.

**Body alignment** - As in the forward approach, body alignment is the MOST critical element toward achieving consistency, and performing truly beautiful dives. Although it may be boring, repeated practice of straight jumps and simple line-up drills are essential to make alignment second nature. Do your dry-land drills religiously, and imagine yourself going in with perfect alignment. Add line-ups and jumps to your routine. Do them every practice, no matter how skilled you become.

**Starting position** - Establish a starting position at the end of the board. Here again, there is some variation among divers. One good technique is to stand facing the ladder, in the center of the diving board with your feet about half-way off the board. Your feet should not be so far off that you can't keep your balance, but enough that you can get your center of gravity outside the plummet with very little lean back. I recommend using a V position: your heels are essentially touching and your toes are a few inches apart. You can also use a V position with your heels an inch or two apart and your toes a little farther. Exact foot position may depend upon your individual body type and balance. Establish your pelvic tilt position and flat back. Put your arms straight out to the sides to help in getting your balance as you adjust your feet. Elevate your heels slightly until they are a little above the level of the board; but don't stand way up on your "tip toes." It will be harder to keep your balance. Your head should be in line and directly above your shoulders, again apply the "straight line principle" that we talked about with the forward approach. Remember that alignment is even more evident when standing backward at the end of the board. Thus, lousy alignment will certainly be noticed by the judges (and of course mess up your dives). After getting your feet positioned, you can leave your hands straight out, put them up alongside your head, or put them back down. I'm recommending leaving them straight out, to avoid losing your balance or wavering. A perfectly aligned and steady starting position looks nice and will also increase your chances of a properly executed dive.

**Oscillations** – This 2 oscillation approach now starts by smoothly raising your feet into a tip toe and back down again twice as your arms raise in opposition of this up & down movement. Keep your legs straight and your body aligned during the oscillations – just raise your heels. After the two oscillations, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tip-toe position, your arms should be up and alongside your head in a suspension position similar to the suspension of the hurdle in the forward approach (see photo). Your head stays still and in line. Now you're ready for the press and take-off. Bring your arms down behind your back as you bend your legs and flatten your feet. This part of the take-off mirrors the forward approach's press and take-off. The arm swing is the same, and the timing is also the same. Your arms should pass in front of your

hips as you straighten your legs out again to drive the board down to maximum deflection. This take-off should be silent, just as the forward press and take-off is very quiet. A cadence of “1-2-press-reach” may help you get a feel for it.

**Take-off** – Since there is no forward momentum from a walk or hurdle, proper lean is critical to achieve safe distance without “falling off.” Generally speaking, just enough lean to clearly establish the diver’s center of gravity past the plummet will provide safe distance; provided that the diver follows through with his arms as he exits from maximum deflection. Just as in the forward approach, your arms must go all the way up prior to take off, then assume the “cocked” position for an inward dive, or the “backward C” position (see photo) for a back dive. Never push your bottom out behind you as you take off. Extend first, then as the board is coming back up to throw you in the air, move your arms into the cocked or backward C position to start the dive (see photo). Coming too close to the board on backward take-offs is often a result of rushing and not following through prior to trying to throw the dive. The moral of the story here is: finish your approach before you do any dive!! Rushing not only results in poor height, but injuries from slipping or striking the board. What IS safe distance? About 6-12” of clearance with your feet extended in a pike position is certainly safe. That way, your dive can achieve good height without making the audience gasp in terror as you miss the board by a gnat’s eyelash. However, a common back jump drill is where you touch the tip of the board with your fingertips as you pass by toward the water. This assures that you’re not falling off - but it’s also very close, and may be best saved for more advanced divers. Note how close the woman is in the photo below. Having a little wiggle room is prudent when you’re first learning!

**Practice** – In both the forward and backward approaches, practice jumping from the springboard in all three positions: tuck, pike, and straight. Do enough repetitions to gain consistency and control. These drills should be a part of every practice and videotaping them is preferred. Divers can watch themselves and see where their alignment problems are, as well as the exact position of their arms during each phase of the approach. Insist on sound fundamentals: pointed toes, flat back, tight tummy, head in line, safe distance, quiet feet, and terrific height.



Suspension before press



Inward dive open pike



Backwards “C” position

**Summary** – Don’t be in too much of a hurry to throw “awesome tricks” before you have control and proper alignment. The alignment practice will result in making the tricks easier, and your dives beautiful. The old adage “perfect practice makes perfect” is very true in diving. Next time we’ll discuss a few basic dives.