

CROSSCUT SAWING

By Michael Slingerland

Introduction

The following information was formulated for the raw novice to be used under the guidance of an experienced competitor/coach. It may also be useful for improving the technique of many established competitors.

The correct way to learn to crosscut saw, is under the guidance of a capable sawyer as coach. It is pointless and dangerous to attempt to "saw a log" much less enter into competition, until you are reasonably competent in the basic skill of using a saw. Newcomers should not be encouraged to compete professionally until they are capable of sawing safely and properly.

I. Standards for standing

The proper position for crosscut sawing is not a comfortable one for most people. Hundreds of hours of practice, trial and error, and consultation with a biomechanicist has however yielded the following results as optimal for a combination of speed, power and technique:

A.) Distance from near edge of block to ball of forward foot:

8"-12" depending on saw length. In small wood the saw should be 5' to 5'4" and the distance from the block should be 8". If a longer saw must be used the sawyer may move back to 10 or 12 inches so that he can pull the full saw without having to pull it past his rear shoulder.

B.) Distance from ball of front foot to midline of back foot:

56 to 72 inches depending on the height of the sawyer. At 5' 8" spread should be 58". At 6' spread should be 61". At 6' 4" + spread should be 63 to 72 inches. It is especially important to spread out when cutting close to the ground. One well-known competitor at 6' 5" spreads 72" between his feet.

C.) Angle of Stance

Sawyer should be turned slightly toward block with rear foot (toes) almost even with line of cut and front foot (toes) about 6 inches outside of line of cut. When set up properly sawyer should be able to pull a full saw and still be able to place fist of rear hand against side of block. Dominant hand should be farthest from block and should grip the handle at or below the "T" with the other hand just above it

II. Pulling your share

When pulling the crosscut saw it is important to pull the full saw in a straight line from the block to your rear shoulder keeping it as level as possible. You should never pull the saw to your waist or past your body. It is important to let your partner control how much wood is cut during your pull rather than trying to cut a lot of wood by pulling the saw down. Pulling down at extreme angles only makes it difficult or impossible for your partner to pull the saw back.

III. Pushing your share too

Contrary to popular belief, the most important aspect of two-man sawing is not pulling the saw but rather pushing it. Properly pushing the saw to your partner or "tailing" the saw allows you to make the saw work at it's peak potential throughout the cut.

The first part of tailing the saw sounds easier than it actually is. You simply hold the saw at the same elevation as when you finished your pull. It is important that you do not begin pushing back until the saw is in front of you and your shoulders are turned toward the block. Pushing too early generally causes the saw to lift out of the wood on your side of the block.

Once the saw is in front of you, push back in a perfectly straight line. The push is primarily with your bottom hand and is at the same speed as your partner is pulling. You should apply downward pressure, during the pushing motion, at an angle of 5-15 degrees.

IV. Getting a leg up on the competition

When sawing you want the saw to be taking out the maximum amount of wood 100% of the time. This goal can be met by keeping the saw level and there by keeping as many of the teeth in the wood as possible. The principle way this is accomplished is by properly using your legs throughout the sawing motion.

The first thing to recognize is that, as your legs straighten your center of gravity rises and as they bend it lowers. To keep your center of gravity (and therefore the saw) moving forward and back, without moving up and down, your legs must work together. When the saw is all of the way into the block your front knee is bent to almost 90 degrees while your back leg is straight (180 degrees). When the saw is all of the way back your front leg is straight (180 degrees) while your back leg is bent to near 90 degrees. The transition between these positions must be as smooth as possible. For each degree of straightening in one leg there must be an equal bending of the other.

V. It takes two

Two-man sawing is a true team event. It requires an almost intuitive sense of what is happening to the saw and your partner throughout the cut, to yield championship results. If you feel that your partner isn't giving you enough pressure during a cut it often means that you are giving him too much pressure. If the saw is pulling hard coming to you, it may be going to easily toward him.

One of the most important parts of developing sawing teamwork is timing. Good timing is developed through training and practice as well as a conscious, mutual decision as to how you will make a given cut. The biggest obstacle to good timing is a hesitation in the stroke. Many otherwise good sawyers have a hesitation between the end of their push and when they begin to pull. I believe this is caused by two factors, one physiological and the other psychological. Firstly a hesitation can be caused if the sawyer allows his arms to become completely straightened when all the way into the block. To avoid this, the arms should always be bent at least a few degrees. Secondly, it is important to think of the crosscut cycle, both push and pull, as one continuous motion rather than as two distinct movements.