

The Tibor Gecsek Clinic

Jay Harvard

Hungarian thrower Tibor Gecsek came to Athens, Georgia for a clinic last fall. This article, written by US hammer throw Jay Harvard, provides a brief summary of the topics covered at the clinic.

A rather imposing figure walked up to my doorstep on a rainy Thursday evening. He had a smile of passion and he knew we were going to “work” that fateful weekend. I had the privilege of hanging out with Tibor Gecsek for a few days when he made the trek to Athens, GA for the Georgia hammer clinic. This man is amazing. I’ve watched many hours of film on hammer throwers, but it wasn’t until recently that I realized exactly how good Tibor is.

God blessed us with a sunny day in the midst of terrible fall weather for the Gecsek clinic. Tibor’s clinic was a whirlwind of turns, throwing, lifting and questions. He selflessly worked with each of the 50+ throwers that attended, giving them pointers and style critiques. His passion is unrivaled and it shows. Okay...enough of the fluffy stuff, let’s get to the numbers.

How Gecsek Trains

Below is a typical Gecsek workout plan for December to the end of March:

Mondays & Fridays

- Mornings: Throwing Session
- Afternoon: Conditioning practice
 - 15 minute warm-up
 - Medicine ball throws into wall 8X15
 - Abdominal work 8X20
 - Seated medicine ball throws 8X15
 - Sprints X 4
 - Afternoon practice is 2 hours long. If there is time left, soccer is played.

Tuesdays & Thursdays

- Morning: Swimming 1000m at 6:00am
 - Throwing Session (See comments below for details on throwing work-out)
- Afternoon: Warm-up
 - Sprints/high knees
 - Weight lifting

Exercises

- Snatch
- Cleans
- Back Squat
- Half Squat
- Leg Press
- Dead Lift

Sets

- warm-up – 3x3 ~65%
- work sets – 5x5 ~85-90%
- maximum effort 2x2 ~97.5%

(YES, ALL of the above sets for ALL of the exercises.)

- Running – 2-4 km after lifting, plus stretching.

Wednesdays

- Morning: Turning drills with 7.26kg hammer for 45 minutes
- Afternoon: Pud throws with 12-16 kg
 - 70-90 throws with long puds
 - standing
 - one-turn
 - Short puds
 - Pulling weight with rope

Saturdays

- Morning: Same as Wednesday afternoon.
- Afternoon: Weight lifting (same workout as Tuesday & Thursday)

Note: All weightlifting sessions are the same

A typical throwing workout consists of:

- 800m jog
- _ hour of turns, no hammer
- _ hour of turns with hammer
- 40-75 throws with 2-3 different weights/lengths hammer.

First part of practice is spent working on technique. The second

Q & A with Gecsek

Some answers are paraphrased from the 1998 book on Gecsek, Return by Ferenc Bodor. Thanks to Andras Haklits for translation!

Q. When were you born?

- a. September 22, 1964

Q. How big are you?

- a. 1.84m and around 107kilos.

Q. When did you start throwing?

- a. 1980--34.26m with 7.26k at 16 years old

Q. When did you become “serious” about throwing? When did you realize throwing was something that you wanted as a lifetime career? When did you fully dedicate yourself to the hammer?

- a. 1982— At the Junior Championship’s for Socialist countries, I finished an unexpected 3rd with a personal best of 59.08. My parents supported me fully and told me to never quit and never turn back.

- Q. Personal bests: distance by hammer weight, lifting bests, jumping, running...At what age did you accomplish these? All in about the same year? Give approx. date. (i.e.- spring 1997, fall 1999.)
- a. In 1998 at the age of 34, I achieved a lifetime personal best of 83.68m in competition. In 1989 at the age of 25, I threw a 14.5kg (~32 lbs) and 61 cm long 30.50m. In 1990 at the age of 25, I threw a 15 kg, 30 cm weight 21.68m. As a junior, at the age of 19 in 1983, I threw a best of 67.90m with the 7.26k.
(For comparison purposes, Andras Haklits ranks third among Szombathely, Hungary training group with a junior toss of 68.84m at 19 years of age.)
- Q. What time of year do you throw which weights? i.e.-9k-fall? 6k-spring?
- a. I throw the 8k to 11k all winter. Stay with the 9k until summer, but mostly throw 6k-8k. I throw all of the different weights in the same throwing workout. Would sometimes I will throw the 5k in the summer as well.
- Q. What is your most memorable moment as a thrower?
- a. Winning the European Championships in August 19, 1998 in front of almost 100,000 people in Budapest, Hungary. My winning throw of 82.87 meters was a seasonal best and personal best at the time.
- Q. What is your greatest accomplishment as a thrower?
- a. Various people quoted of Gecsek...it's like a boxer who is knocked down and has the count of 8, then gets up off of the mat and wins the fight. I came back from suspension and won the Grand Prix Final (81.21m), European Championships (82.87m), World Cup (82.68m) and broke the Hungarian record (83.68m)
- Q. What is the main factor that contributed to your success?
- a. Supports from my parents and training with coach Paul Nemeth.
- Q. What are some of the main technical flaws that you saw at the clinic? Best way to fix them?
- a. Look at the hammer. When you turn your head and don't look at the hammer, you may pull/drag. Don't pull away with your head, but keep your head aligned with your shoulders and look at the ball. Also, do many, many, many turns (not 100% throws) with light hammers. Do ten turns in a row just to feel the rhythm and footwork and to be comfortable with turning.
- Q. What one technical component did you do best or master?
- a. Stay with the hammer, don't turn ahead.

- Q. What is your approach to competition? i.e.-1st throw- a safety throw or a hard throw?
- a. In big meets, like World Championships, I tried to achieve a result that would make the final. After that, five throws all out. In small meets, I chased the “big” throw for all six attempts.
- Q. Who was your biggest rival/competitor? People you enjoyed throwing with?
- a. I enjoyed throwing with Sedykh. My biggest competitors were Astapkovich and Abduvaliev.
- Q. Was there any component of your technique that was always there, no matter how good or bad that you felt?
- a. I always had great footwork, no matter what.
- Q. Was your personal best throw the “perfect throw?”
- a. Yes.
- Q. Seems like you had a fairly injury free career. Any particular reason? Masage? Treatment? Any serious injuries?
- a. In December of 1991, I was locked in his house on the third floor. I was trying to get out from the balcony/fire escape and fell, injuring my left heel. The injury kept me out of the ring for over a month. I also had a few arthroscopic surgeries on his knees around 1999 for minor repairs. I never suffered from a serious back injury, which is a common injury for hammer throwers. This is even more remarkable given the recent history of Hungarian hammer throwers like Andras Haklits and Zsolt Nemeth. I attribute starting at an early age and developing core strength early to his healthy career.
- Q. Any regrets? Why are you quitting?
- a. Even though it was going really well (his last meet was over 80m), it is time to move on. Family is very important and I have neglected them long enough. Also, I think he would have to work that much harder to maintain his strength and technique and to be able to compete with the younger hammer throwers.
- Q. Will we be seeing a Gecsek come-back?
- a. Probably not. (or maybe Tibor pulls a Deal...to quote Haklits...”Old men talking s**t.”)

As Jerry Clayton noted at the Q&A session...American hammer throwers need more throws/turns if we want to compete internationally.

Cues from Gecsek

Interesting semantics/cues from Gecsek (from the perspective of a right-handed thrower).

- When drilling, pop or stomp the right foot down when landing back in double support. Do not land easy or softly by sliding the foot in. Stomping the foot facilitates a drop with the left leg and a push with the right. Be careful here. If you listen for the stomp, you may be landing hard on your right because your weight is forward. Make sure when you drop or stomp, bend at the knee, seating the hips back. Do not rock forward.
- Keep the hips back with relaxed shoulders, but keep your core integrity. This lengthens the radius of the hammer/thrower system. The trap here that some inexperienced throwers may fall into...keeping the legs straight and bending at the waist. This isn't good. Instead, you have to keep your core area tight (the area from the waist and low back up to the bottom of the pecs). When relaxing, only relax the upper back and shoulders and "collapse" the chest. The purpose here is to increase the distance (radius) from the hips to the head of the hammer. Don't do this by piking with straight legs and bent back.
- Be long pushing to the left, not necessarily pushing hard from double support to "zero." I disagree on the second part. I try to push all the way around.
- Push 270 to 360 on the winds, driving the turn with the legs and not the shoulders. The cue Gecsek used was to keep your hands close to your right ear as you turn back to catch the ball on the winds. This is a lot different than the American Togher/Deal philosophy of keeping the winds long all of the way around to create a pendulum effect.
- When going into the first turn, keep the hands/ball below the shoulders at 90-degrees. Keep the orbit oriented correctly around the throw. Keep shoulders level.
- Keep the legs bent.
- Gecsek also advocates pre-cocking/turning the right foot when stepping into double-support. This is a difficult concept to execute correctly. When pre-cocking, do not stick the hip out which causes you to break at the waist. Rather, pre-turn the foot just a little to give you a head start into the next turn.

Conclusion

We didn't reinvent the wheel in Athens, but we did learn quite a bit about the Hungarian training philosophy and style of throwing. What I took from the clinic... Oh my God the volume.

And a shameless plug...If you want a copy of the video and handouts from the clinic (you know you do!), drop me a line – jayharvard@hotmail.com