The Learning Curve

A regular feature sponsored by the Central Council Education Committee
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More about coils

Last month's article prompted comment from some quarters that it missed a lot out. The main message was to make the coil with rope that is below, not above, your upper hand. This is essential to avoid a sudden rope shortening, which makes the bell drop. Many people have this problem, but it is far from the whole story, so here is some more. *(You might find it helps to follow some of the descriptions with a length of rope or cord to practise with as you read).*

When to make the coil

We saw last time how the controlling hand gradually works its way up the rope, and when there is enough spare rope the other hand makes it into a coil. What we did not describe in detail is how the coil is actually made, except to say that it takes place very quickly, while the rope is slack after the handstroke. In fact because it is quick, you often don't see people making the coil. You look away for a second and when you look back, there it is.

The diagram in last month's article showed the action with respect to the rope, ie hands separating and the lower hand bringing the tail end under the other hand to form the coil. The pictures were static, but of course the rope is moving, so the coil making has to be superimposed onto the overall rope movement. There are two ways to do this.

The textbook method superimposes the coil making onto the normal backstroke action. Your hands are separated by letting the upper hand rise with the rope, while the other lingers with the tail end sliding through it. If you get the timing and movement right, your lower hand will be on the end of the tail as the backstroke rise completes. Then on the descent, your upper hand moves down towards the lower hand, which completes the coil as shown last time. Be sure to do this before your hand has to rise to catch the sally for the next handstroke.

By spreading the action out like this, you don't need to make such a quick movement, so you are less likely to cause rope flapping. The slight disadvantage is that you effectively ring the backstroke one handed, which can lead to sideways pulling if the rope does not run true.

Making the second coil is similar, but there is no clear guide for how far down the rope your lower hand should go. You want to draw out as little as possible of the previous coil, so it does not get too small, but you can pull too much out when you let the rope lift your upper hand.

Not everyone uses the textbook method. You can make the whole coil after the descent of the handstroke and before starting the rise to the backstroke, when the rope is slack for about half a second. The action is as described last time, but you have to be very quick before the rope takes your hands up. Most people find it too quick and prefer to do it the other way.

Observe people when lowering, and you will see several different actions, some less desirable than others. Some people keep the lower hand on the tail end as the upper hand works its way up the rope. That means ringing mainly one handed for several strokes, since the lower hand will not be very effective. You can get away with it on easy bells, but it will cause problems with heavier or more demanding bells.

An even worse habit is not moving your hands up the rope as the bell comes down, but gripping the same place, so that your arms rise less and less. They become more and more bent, giving you even less control, and you have to guess how much rope to use for the coil.

Never lift your lower hand past your upper one. The pictures last month showed the lower hand lifting the end of the rope to make the coil. That causes no problems if done quickly around the low point - in fact the upper hand probably moves down as well.

Releasing coils

Shedding coils ought to be easier than making them, but some people have trouble with this too. It is the opposite of making a coil, but doesn't always feel quite like that.

Remember that your upper hand should stay in the same place on the rope, just as it does when making a coil, and the coil operations use the spare rope below the upper hand. Releasing a coil lets out more rope than you might realise. A 6" (150mm) diameter coil lets out almost 20" (500mm) of rope. Even a tight 3" (75mm) coil lets out nearly 10" (250mm) which is far more extra rope than you need in a raise. So where does the rope go? It must go normal into the next coil, making it bigger than it was.

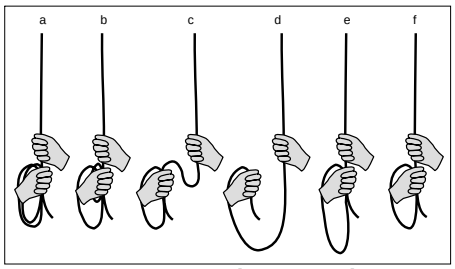

Figure 1: Releasing a coil

Figure 1 shows this. Starting with two coils (a) you let out rope, reducing the size of the first coil until it is tight around your hand (b). Your lower hand releases this small coil (c) and then lets go of the next coil (d) before moving back towards the upper hand, where it remakes the now enlarged coil (e). As you continue letting out rope, the oversize coil reduces again (f).

The last coil

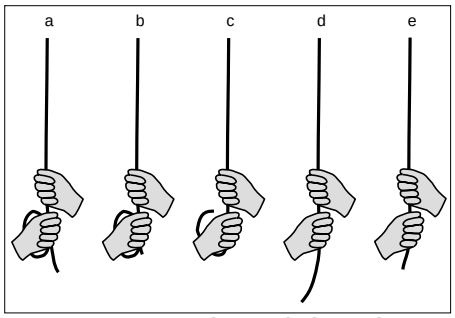

Figure 2: Releasing the last coil

When you release the last coil, the action can be different, as shown in Figure 2. Let out rope until the loop is tight around your hands (a) as before. Then as you feed out more rope, let the tail end also move through your lower hand (b) until the end comes out (c) and hangs free (d). Then continue to move down the rope (e).

Adjusting coils

To make coils larger or smaller, you need to feed rope in or out through your hands. There are two different ways to do this: a two handed action and a one handed action

• In the two handed action, you feed the rope from one hand to the other. To take in rope, grip it with your lower hand and pull a little rope through the upper hand. Then bring your lower hand back just under the upper one. Letting rope out is the reverse, with the upper hand pulling rope through the lower one and then moving down again. If you keep the action small, you can move just an inch or two of rope, but with a bigger action, you can move quite a lot, making it useful if you are lowering or raising a bell quickly on its own.

• In the one handed action, the thumb and forefinger of your lower hand 'nibble' the rope in or out while your upper hand takes the handstroke - so you can only use it while ringing the sally with one hand. You can only move about an inch at a time this way, but that is what you need for a smooth progression up or down the rope when lowering in peal.

Whichever technique you use to adjust the coils, it is important to realise that however many coils you might already have, you must only move one piece of rope through your lower hand - the piece that goes through your upper hand to the bell. If you move any other rope at the same time, you will disturb the coils you have already made. The classic error is to make your first small coil and then keep feeding both parts of the rope through your hand. After a while, the coil will still be small, but you will have a long, and increasingly unwieldy tail end hanging out of your hand. It is very difficult to get out of this position. The best bet is to drop the coil, and re-make it with your left hand (the quick method, which is even harder in this situation). It's best to avoid it in the first place!

Should you drop your coils?

Occasionally you see someone drop all the coils at the end of a lower, and let the rope fall on the floor. Is that bad form, or do they know something that you don't?

It is purely a matter of practicality. You make coils to stop the loose end of the rope flapping around and causing problems for you and anyone else nearby. When the bell is nearly down, the movement of your arms is not enough to cause serious rope flapping, so you don't need the coils any more, but most of us keep them because it is convenient to do so. If you lower a heavy bell, the longer rope (because of the bigger wheel) forms more coils, and if the rope is thick as well, they could prove to be a handful. This is the main reason people drop them - it is easier to grip the sally properly when your hands are not over full of coils.

An impressive performance

The most accomplished coil making I ever saw was lowering 1-2 of a twelve, double handed in peal. I was on the Tenor, thinking 'he'll manage without coils' when all of a sudden there was a coil in each hand. Watching carefully, I saw the next ones being made - each hand deftly helped to make the coil in the opposite one - all within a single stroke.

Tail End

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