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Buddy Rich Advises Using a Pillow For Practicing

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In Conjunction with Henry Adler

Many young drummer wonder why their technique fails to improve in proportion to the amount of time they spend on a practice pad. The answer to this problem lies in knowing the proper method of practicing, with special emphasis on developing a technique.

Technique, to begin with, is the exclusive property of a drummer with Strong wrists. You therefore should practice in such a manner so as to compel your wrists to do most of the work in the execution of your studies.

The first step is to eliminate completely the arm motion commonly used in drumming. In order to do this properly, it is best to keep an eye on your arms, while playing to check up on any uncalled for movement from them. If you only took the trouble to look at your arms, you would be amazed at the amount of sledge-hammer arm motion you unknowingly use while practicing.

The next step is to eliminate completely the bounce. I would suggest practicing on a pillow as the best, yet simplest, object to answer the need of a bounce-less pad. I would also suggest using your own pillow, so as not to antagonize any members of your family against your playing drums.

I might add at this point that it would be a very good idea for you to maintain a firm grip on your sticks with your fingers. In this position, you will find it more natural to play on the pillow with your wrists.

Now that you are armed with your bounce-proof pillow and your determination to eliminate all arm motion, try practicing one of your rudiments. Play the rudiment very slowly at first, and Walch Your Arms. If you become a little tired, stop and rest for a few seconds. Never over-strain yourself. Keep practicing slowly until you're able to play in that particular tempo with ease, entirely without any strain. Not until then should you attempt to increase the speed of the rudiment. Thus, very gradually are you to increase the rate of speed in your practicing.

This method of practicing is one which requires plenty of patience and consistent effort on your part. If you do practice patiently and faithfully every day, you will be more than amply rewarded for the extra time you have spent in studying. Your wrists will gradually begin to develop to such an extent that you no longer will have to use your arms unnaturally in order to play. What's more, the newly acquired power in your wrists will enable you to execute your musical problems in a manner so relaxed as to make practicing, as well as playing, a new and satisfying pleasure.

Buddy Rich, Tommy Dorsey's famous drummer, offers regular advice to METRONOME readers. Send him your questions ; he'll be glad to answer them.