

# Larry's Corner

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Do you have any likes or dislikes, stories, or helpful hints for dancing? If so, write it down and give to Larry Ablin or Barb Johnson. We will add it to one of the future News letters.

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If you would like to tell us how you became interested in dancing, write it down and give to Larry or Barb, we will add your picture with it and put it in one of the future Newsletters

## Coaster Steps In WCS

In general a coaster step is one of two common (and good) ways to change direction (the other way is a rock step). For this discussion assume the lady's footwork on counts 5&6 in swing (either east coast or west coast 6 count figures). Both steps (rock step and coaster step) take 2 counts of music (5&6). A rock step is two steps while the coaster step is three steps. As has been pointed out, the coaster step is a "step-together-step" triple (5&6). A forward coaster step would be step forward-together-back. A back coaster step would be back-together-forward.

If the lady is moving backwards and you would like to change her direction - without a stop in momentum - then she can coaster step and be coming forward. This is common in (Yuck!) ballroom styles of west coast swing that have a very continuous look and feel. The lady is moving backward going into the 5&6 and she is moving forward coming out of the 6 - thus the continuous look.

In the true "anchored" west coast swing there are intended breaks in the continuity of the dance. When the movement is continuous, as in a simple 8-count whip pattern (lock, closed, crossed hand or variations) it is

likely the lady will do a coaster step on counts 3&4 as she changes direction and the move continues. When the movement pattern "ends" there are at least 2 counts of "anchor" (counts 7&8 in a whip pattern). In some styles (push/whip) there are arbitrarily long patterns of continuous movement that quite often contain coasters steps to change direction - then at the end of the pattern there is an anchor step or "double resistance" that stops the continuity. In a single basic six count pattern, the lady does not coaster step but rather is anchored (in place) on 5&6 and probably "playing" with step patterns (but NOT moving forward until the guy leads her.)

In WCS it is very important for the follower not to move until the leader indicates. A common problem in West Coast Swing occurs when the follower does a down-the-track back-replace-forward (coaster-step) on 5&6 instead of back-replace-back (anchor-step). If the follower moves forward on the last count, the body-body connection is broken and leading becomes impossible. In some cases this may cause the follower to crash into the leader. Leaders, if someone does this to you, either accept the disconnected lead and try to pick up in the middle of the next pattern, or else maintain your arm where it is supposed to be and the lead reverses from a pull to a push. The lead reversal causes general confusion, but sometimes lets the follower know to stay back. And leaders - don't you step back on your anchor! If the leader steps back on his six (and I have seen this happen) he will be leading the follower forward on six and cause her to coaster.

Reasons most WCS teachers adamantly oppose coaster-steps (where she should be doing an anchor-step):

Since the lady is at the end of the slot on 4, she should be turning on the 5 & 6. If she goes back together on 5& her hips stick out behind her shoulders. While many top dancers can do a coaster step here, it looks terrible on beginners. Since the lady moves her base farther than the man's arm will allow, something has to give. Usually the lady bends at the waist and her rump protrudes. If her momentum is such that it is greater than the man's balance, she'll pull him forward over the top of his toes. As one who teaches beginners

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through professionals the last thing I want is a follower that pulls on the 5 & 6, or is heavy on the succeeding 1. On 6 of a coaster-step the lady is coming forward without having been led which precludes the man from leading many of the push type break endings popular in both California & Texas style W/C. When the lady invariably pulls herself forward on 6, I she will walk through a stop in the man's left hand because he's trying to push in the same direction she is pulling.

A WCS coaster can be done without acquiring forward momentum. Grab a doorknob and try it. And when it's done right it looks WONDERFUL. I have been taught the coaster as a basic break-ending on almost every pattern I've learned. I am always in position before I start the coaster (supposed to be anyway). And at the end of the coaster I am always ready to step forward on my right foot, which I also believe to be the same as any other break-ending. What my teacher emphasizes as critically important in the coaster step is that while your feet move back and forth, your body stays exactly where it was when you stepped on 4. This is not an easy thing to do, and it involves lots of hip action. I always know when I do it wrong because I pull her. (and they don't like it!).

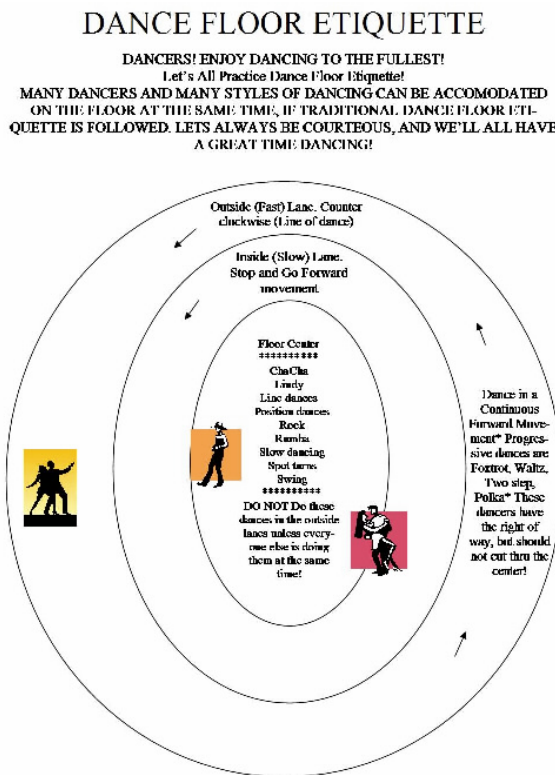
Coaster steps can also be done perpendicular to the slot (e.g. turning perpendicular on five, and turning back on or about six). This is just one of many footwork variations that can be done as part of a "turn-away". There is clearly no problem with forward momentum in that case. Discouraging the coaster step simply because it's possible to do it badly is to remove a major element of WCS styling. Why not just teach it properly instead?

At the end of a WCS basic, no coaster step is led. However, the coaster step embedded in a whip is explicitly led. The man will make you step back with pressure on the arm, then pull you forward with pressure on the shoulder blade. Since in your head the '12 3&4 56...' count is going on, you will automatically follow a coaster step. Now he may neglect to lead this correctly, and if you are well-trained you will step correctly anyway. BUT, if he was actually leading some esoteric pattern that begins like a whip but does not end like one, you will be doing a coaster step when

something else was really being led. If you are really well-trained as opposed to just well-trained you won't follow a badly-led whip the first time around, because you won't do the coaster step that was not led. But the next time around you will adjust for the bad lead and follow it correctly. So I propose these rules for WCS only:

When there is room for syncopation, feel free to do anything, including a coaster step, provided you retain the arm tension.

At other times, a coaster step should be done only when led, unless you can tell that a coaster step should have been led but was not, in which case you will follow a coaster step anyway. In actual practice you won't have enough time to think through these rules anyway!



So many WCS dancers agree a down-the-track coaster on the anchor is bad. But many times it's not her fault. Visualizing this next paragraph is easier if you've read a lot of BC comics :-). Suppose you give her a big lead down the slot and then don't follow her on 4. (Or worse, step away from her on 4.) When she runs out of arm, she snaps around on 5 with the back step, she regains her balance on her R foot on &, and then she ends up coming forward on 6 because her arm won't let her go back. Eureka! The man just led a coaster step. :-). Another way to cause this same affect is to tell a lady to travel down the slot until she "runs out of arm." You could tell her all night long that she's doing coaster steps. But until you tell her to stop running out of arm, she can't help but do a coaster step.

The value of the coaster step in changing directions is really appreciated by those who do high speed forms of swing dance. That is, and still do triples instead of transitioning into Flying Lindy. You will notice if you look that quite a few swing dancers that dance "anchored" west coast swing who hate the idea of coaster steps at the end of patterns actually use

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coaster steps when they dance to fast songs (when they aren't syncopating). That doesn't mean you have to do coasters when dancing to fast songs but many do use them. A coaster anchor leaves the woman's center point of balance (CPB) shifted slightly forward toward the man which allows her to respond to a feather lead instead of following like a Mack Truck. Yes, many follows can be quite heavy when they are anchoring – especially for faster swings. Shifting the CPB forward does indeed take care of this problem. However, it really precludes the anchored look and feel. I have danced with a few really great followers that can anchor well at any speed and still come out with my lead without being too heavy. Quite a difficult combination! With good connection coasters aren't necessary but might be desirable - again, depends on the look you want.

Since a coaster step is a good way to change direction and keep momentum, it can be used in many dances. Quite often the question is "when I need a direction change and want momentum coming OUT of the change, do I use a coaster or a rock?" That's easy - do you need to change feet or not (difference between step-step and triple step). I use coasters and rocks in every dance I do (East Coast, West Coast, 2Step, Waltz, Polka, Triple Two, Cha Cha, Hustle.....). When I choreograph a dance for competition or shows I use a bit more since I want more direction changes to give different looks to the dance. Both the lady and the man can do rocks and coasters and quite often NOT at the same time. I use rocks and coasters quite a bit to help me lead more with the body. Remember – leading is all about controlling balance and momentum. Thus, any techniques that help with managing and controlling momentum are important.

### **Leading American Style Ballroom Open Figures**

Obviously in closed dance position, American smooth style ballroom dancing lead/follows are identical to

International, and the technique is also identical. Many American dance positions are the same except for the man's left/lady's right hand positions, and the lead is the same here also. In "close shadow" position (the man and woman both facing forward, man behind and to the left, the lead here is STILL the same, since the bodies are in the same relative position except that the woman is turned around. Hand positions are different, but the man's right elbow is in the same position as in closed hold. All these leads are "body leads" progress-

ing (theoretically) from the floor, through the feet, legs, and center body, to the woman's center body.

This same "body lead" progression works in the more open positions, except that if there is a hand to hand connection, the lead progresses from the man's center body through his arms to the woman's arms which are theoretically connected to her center body. The techniques here are similar to Latin (see below).

When the partners are completely apart, as in a free spin, the woman uses the indication from the man that led them apart as a guide to movement (how many turns, what direction, etc.) and does something within the logical structure of the dance in terms of rise/fall and rhythm. At the collection point, the man makes adjustments to the lady's position, picks whatever part of the lady is handy, typically hand or hands or his right hand on her center body, attempts to connect the two bodies into one unit, and prepares to swing into the next figure. After the movement, the man has to figure out what happened, often "fake" to get on the proper foot, adjust his position to match the woman's, and re-establish some sort of center body connection.

When the partners are apart for more than a measure or so (great fun socially) the leads are totally visual. Normally the woman follows the man, but in my case I am often following (i.e. chasing) my partner, and trying to match her movements until I re-establish contact. The entire process has been summed up as a continuing progression of:

The man suggests a movement ("leads")

The lady does something she considers logical ("follows")

The man adjust to her position ("figures out what happened")

They both collect together ("back together")

It is interesting to me that International Style dancers are very well trained in leading and following techniques as they apply to the myriad of positions and movements in Latin, but have no concept as to how similar ideas apply to smooth dance movements (which tend to be simpler). The techniques are the same, it's only the type of movement that is different. If the bodies are connected in some logical fashion and the leader does a strong movement, like lowering and swinging the body, the follower gets the message, and amazingly enough, often does a similar complimentary movement.

### Swing Clubs

East Meets West; 952-949-3016; 1st and 3rd Friday Dance at Dancesport in Hopkins 816 1/2 Main St.

Minnesota West Coast Swing; 651-731-9768; 2nd and 4th Friday Dance at B-Dale Club South of the Dale and Cty. B in St. Paul.

TC Rebels Swing club; Hotline number 952-941-0906; Dances are at Harmonie Dance center Corner of Old Shakopee Rd and France

When dancing West Coast Swing be sure to line your slot with the boards on the floor. If no boards then line up with length of room

Singles all Together has Ballroom lessons on Monday night 8 pm at the Lenox Center in St Louis Park.

Singles all Together West Coast Swing on Tuesday night 8 pm at Medina Ballroom Next session starts 1/6/2004.

Basic Step for Foxtrot is

Man

Left foot forward slow for 2 beats.

Right foot Forward slow for 2 beats.

Left foot short step sideways for 1 beat.

Right foot together with left foot for 1 beat.

Lady Does the same thing only backwards starting with the Right foot.

Larry Ablin

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[Http://www.dancempls.com](http://www.dancempls.com) to find out *where* to dance.



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Leaders: If you only remember one thing, this should be it: Global lead/follow rule – Lead Direction Before Rotation. This means that if it's a traveling spin, you must lead her to travel before leading her to spin. If it's a stationary spin, you must lead her to stay in place before leading the spin.

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[Http://www.dancempls.com](http://www.dancempls.com) to find out *where* to dance.



**Come dance with us**



Larry L Ablin and Barb Johnson

Teach Beginners at Singles All Together dance class on Monday night, at Lenox center on Minnetonka Blvd in St Louis Park.

Teach at Singles All Together on Tuesday night 8pm at Medina. Starting West Coast Swing Intermediate again on 3/2/2004

Teach Ballroom at Jefferson Community Ed on Wednesday at 26th and Hennepin 612-668-2740 Next class starts 1/29/2004 630-830 8 weeks

Lakeville Class starts 1/30/2004 630 to 930pm Century Junior High 952-985-4610

Prior lake class start 2/19/2004 630 to 940pm Grainwood Elementary 952-440-2930

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