

A treatise on the art of DDC!

Compiled by Carlton Howard

(Editor's note – a few corrections in spelling and general formatting have been made to this document, the original content has not been changed.)

Throw in. Throw deep.

Throw in. This is listed twice for a reason. It is REALLY important. If one is just starting out then your first goal is to practice your throws...between games!)

You need to be able to throw in both using some form of both counter and clockwise throws so that you can handle any wind direction and throw successfully from either court.

Catch the disc with a throwing grip, ready to throw. Try to catch it with two hands, thumbs up, ready to throw either backhand (if you have both).

If you can, it is always better to catch and throw, rather than tip. It may only take a moment longer and you're out of the play without having a tip that may be difficult to handle.

Anything below the waist, try to catch and throw. (The tip is so tough.)

Watch your court depth. Set up with the idea of making a dump very tough...so play at least 6 – 8 feet off the front line. (Any burn that beats you from there was a great shot. You can live with those. Most of the burns that you can't reach will be short.)

Once the disc is over your head (a dump) get on your horse right away. As soon as the dump gets up, get on it.

Triangulate the disc. For perfect positioning on each incoming disc, position yourself halfway between where the disc will hit the ground and where you can easily tip it (about shoulder height, perfect tipping height).

When you have the designate, and there is a stalemate, be certain that when you initiate play that your shot at least goes beyond (past) the guy holding the disc in the other court. If it is directly behind him, even better, as this will give you the added advantage of a cross up/entanglement. But even if you don't go for the cross up, get it past the other player's court depth. Your initiation shot has always got to be very deep...behind the guy on the other side (that is holding a disc, waiting for you to initiate since it's your des).

Tipping

Tip softly. Soft hands. Most players tip too hard.

Over tipping is probably the #1 problem with most fronts. Why tip? The escape is the first concern. Improving the subsequent attack is a much lower priority.

Conrad Damon on tipping:

There are different methods used for tipping, and tipping a lead differs from tipping a burn. Some players tip a lead with one hand, either by using the palm and rotating the hand in the direction of spin to add spin, or by using the tips of the fingers to pop the disc into the air. I use

two hands, tipping the disc with the fingers of my right hand and using the left hand as a "rail" on the side to keep the disc in front of me. That's a very common method.

Tipping a hard, low burn is a challenge. In general, the best way is to deflect / block it. You generally don't need to provide upward momentum; the disc's momentum is enough. Some people "ramp" it, sort of like a volleyball dig, but that's pretty rough on the forearms. For medium to slow burns, I tip the same way I tip leads.

If a slow disc has the wind under it and some angle, you may be able to brush it.

John Greensage on tipping:

- 1) It's all in the brain baby!
- 2) Front line tipping is almost never a means of escaping an attack. Rather it is a means of gaining superior court position. Front's should automatically be quick throwing everything. Then if you see something easy to tip you can add the icing....
- 3) so master your quick catches for all combinations of both sides, both spins, from ground level up. As you then never need to tip you will be flawless.
- 4) Be stopped so you can go fetch that tip. If moving, don't tip.
- 5) Monitor / measure your success rate. Success is a (clean tip which is still spinning (not butter flying), which stays close so that it is easily caught. Height of a tip is ****not**** a success factor, other than it being high enough. Nipples high will do it! So of the various categories (I think of which burn they are plus which quick catch they would be) the line I like is 90%. Tip 10 in a row in practice - 9 of 10 is the line. Practice is going to be easier than a game. Keep a literal count while you are playing that's 2 of 2 tips, that's 2 of 3 tips, every time after you tip. After the game do the math. How many of those could you have caught and thrown? If you are for example 7 of 10 and could have thrown 10 of 10, was the front line position worth those 3 points? Most likely, you would see that you were really 6 of 6 for some fluffy two finger burns and 1 of 3 for another category for good off sides tipped while you were moving fast, and 0 of 2 for another category. So what is the better question to ask yourself?

As a note, in nasty conditions (like a finals in AZ), I move my threshold to 80% for tight attacks. The reason is that as the back's job get harder, there are more close calls, so the tip actually pays off enough in avoiding backside doubles, that it is worth the risk.

Front Play

Rick LeBeau on front play:

- 1) Knees bent. Whatever else you're thinking or not thinking, you're going to get to a lot more throws if you're ready. Somehow, just having your knees bent makes the thrower try to do things differently to get around your state of readiness. You know what I mean? Seeing your opponent standing with straight legs can really add to your confidence level.
- 2) There is some thinking involved, and adjusting, of course. Don't worry about over-thinking - that's just over-thinking itself.

3) This could be #1- keep the other team deep. Obviously, each meter away from the front line that you keep the other team will result in you looking that much better on the front line of your own court. Keep them far away from you, and you will get to more throws. It's that simple.

4) Play a big court- this is a mentality you have to have. It's the opposite of the "hope its out" strategy. Go after most everything, but keep it balanced with a good eye for the shots that are going out. This forces the thrower to widen his throws, usually forcing more shots to go out as he tries to evade your catlike prowess.

5) If the doubling shot arrives and your back has made no call, then you (the front man) might consider tipping. There's a slight risk of the double here but at least you can do something and maybe escape.

Back Play

You've got to make a call...even if it's wrong. Otherwise you are likely to lose 2 points. When in doubt call "go".

You've got to watch both discs as you prepare to make your call. You'll often need to "run around" your disc so that you can see both the lead shot you have to play as well as the doubling shot your partner (the front man) has to play. You want to be able to see both discs, so that you can make the best call.

John Greensage on Back Play:

Back Positioning

Positioning – are you getting deep, far, far behind the lead and drifting forward from there before the lead begins to descend (i.e. is half-way to your court? This is the last moment to be moving forward from a deep position. If not, you are out of position already at this point, so problems will compound. Experienced backs will be able to make it work when out of position, but this is the artistry rather than the mechanics you want to learn from. When playing back, I like to be 4 or 5 full strides away from the other two points (tipping position and milking position) at the outset of the attack, and charge in from there.

The Back's Escape Triangle

You need to ****mentally**** practice the back's escape triangle of court by visualizing escapes in slow motion. See a lead coming in, get in position, see a doubling shot, drift forward, make a call, move to execute.

3 points to the triangle. Milk point, tip point, view point.

1) Milk point. This is where you would catch the disc at the end of a milk in a quick release grip facing the direction you will throw. (Generally as close to where the disc will hit the ground as you can reliably make it)

2) Tip point. Where you would tip the disc (i.e. at a point where it drops within reach but is still generally well above your head)

The milk point and the tip point form the "Disc line". This is essentially the path the disc will fly from your tip point to your milk point.

3) View point. This is a spot you choose and you manipulate with purpose. Your goal is to readily view both discs. It is your chosen point to view both discs which is constrained by needing to be close enough to the milk point and tip point to execute either before the attack arrives. You may also manipulate this point to avoid looking into the sun, and to control which quick release, relative to the wind, you will use as a back if your front should tip.

Moving View Point

Often your “view point” moves into the triangle - you drifting forward as you view the play, and then accelerate into the triangle. This momentum helps you get to either the milk point or tip point more quickly once you have made a call.

The pacing of your drift forward helps you know when you must make a decision. At some point you must go towards one point or the other of the triangle and have enough time to get there before the discs have arrived. You should be moving forward at a rate to be able to catch the disc at the end of the milk, including changing directions a step away from the “disc line”.

Mental Escaping

Often the mental process of deciding is reframed as a simple single question, “Can I tip this lead before my front must catch?” If yes, you do, if not you give a “go” call to your front and you milk. This is the core. This can be thought of as the “tipping preferred method” (see my article in the DDC Players Association Article Vol. #2 1981). You are set to tip and you are going to tip, but you will wait as long as is reasonably possible and open to being disproved by the eminent arrival of the doubling shot while the lead still is out there a ways.

Wind

With more wind, you can bring all points closer together. You could choose a lower tip point, a higher and easier milk point, and be a little closer to your base line. Then when the wind moves the discs, you are more likely to be able to move your triangle in response.

Wicked Attacks

Some attacks and situations are nasty. Manipulate the 3 points of the escape triangle accordingly. If your opponents throw nasty burns your front is slow to catch and throw, you can move your tip point out further – potentially as high as you can jump and tip (Conrad is fond of this). Move the milk point closer to the ground. Watch how low Mark Horn milks sometime.

What if I get tough wind and Wicked Attacks???

That’s the fun part. Enjoy! You can chose how aggressive to be. Being more aggressive than you can execute can be self defeating. You can be very conservative and execute well, and just give up a point on great attacks. Losing a point here and there does not mean losing the game. Get it back elsewhere.

Further Mastery

With more mastery, you may wish to ask different questions, such as “can my front tip before I must catch” (i.e. before my lead reaches the milk point). These questions are much more

complicated, and should be preceded with an analysis of the situation (who is throwing what throw, how fast, how far away from the front). Often as a back we have a very good idea if a doubling shot is going to be readily tipped. For example, an off-side floppy burn from the front line thrown by a good player, is usually going to require the front to move hard and play the disc low – not something I like to try to tip as a front! A two-finger upside-down (UD / hammer) throw upwind from deep in the court is more likely to be tipable. You just need to note if it is going to be high enough to be tipped by the front.

If you are not seeing a front tipable burn, ask yourself the standard question instead - “can I tip this lead before my front must catch.” That question is still good enough to win at world’s though I’m pretty sure Conrad and JK at least ask themselves the “can my front tip before I must catch” question.

Conrad Damon on Back Play:

My thoughts on playing back are pretty close to John's. When I teach people to play back, I boil things down to three points:

1. Positioning

By far the most important, and often overlooked. If you're out of position, you will need to do something athletic to escape, or get lucky. Good positioning makes everything else much easier to pull off. The basics of positioning are to put yourself where you can see both the lead and the burn at the same time. If you can't see both when making a call, you are going to have to guess. When a lead is coming in, I try to quickly get to an area where I'm likely to play the lead and look directly at the player who will be throwing the attack shot. As the lead comes in, I fine-tune.

2. Make your call early

The earlier you make the call, the easier it is for your front to execute. There's a sweet spot in there timing-wise, between waiting and gathering maximum info about the attack, and giving your front time. Of course, it varies depending on the speed of the attack.

3. If you get confused, call "Go" and see what happens.

After you call, milk your disc as much as you can. You'll be surprised how often you end up making the escape. I think that's because many players don't realize how much extra time it takes for a lead to get from head-high to the ground.

As John pointed out, to a back there are two crucial points in the lead's descent: the earliest point when it can be tipped, and the latest point where it can be caught. Instead of a triangle, I think of those as forming windows, one in time and one in space. The window in one determines what call you'll make. The larger the window, the easier it should be to make and execute the correct call. The window in space determines your footwork. The larger that window, the tougher the escape.

There are several specific attacks that benefit from refinements on what's been written, but the principles are the same. Over the years I've gravitated toward more "Go" calls. That was natural given that early in my career as a back since I tipped everything, and just jumped higher if the attack was early.

True Discussions

Harvey Brandt (after AZ States four years ago):

For D (an opponent - playing back) - he really needs to work on keeping his initiation shots deeper. When it was your des, he frequently would throw a shot that left either me or Conrad too close to the front line. Bad place from which to have Conrad throwing a burn. It is better to worry about throwing it out the back and then dialing it back in than to be constantly leaving folks at the front. Especially at this level of play. When ATTACKING the other team, it isn't too bad to throw it (the first shot) a little shorter in the court because then the burn can come on top of it and cause confusion. Can't recall too much about his calling, seemed OK. The key for a back is to make ANY call even if it is a wrong call. I sometimes freeze up and don't make any call at all and that is when you lose 2 points.

For you (playing front) - you mentioned being out of position for some burns. I always try to think about from where the player is throwing and who it is. I usually back up a bit from the (front) line because it is easier to rush forward for a short one than to get back for a dump. I also quite frequently shade closer to someone's strong side when I see what grip they are showing. Most folks give away their grip early. That way I am in position for the faster strong side burn and am almost daring them to throw the off-side. Most people are not as good with the off-side so this pressure of my being in position for the strong side might force a bad shot either way. So I am moving before they even are throwing. Sometimes I even bait them with a juke to one side or the other. Make them try the difficult shot or at least think about it.

For escaping, I try to catch the disc with my hands already in the throwing position. Patience is the key, can't hurry the tip. Conrad also tips very high so I know I have time, frequently I will look over at him, but that is a luxury. I love to tip as well, so that is another reason I try to get into position early, I can get better tips. I also try to give as much info to Conrad as possible. Like "slow" or "dump" or "time". Takes some time to work out those things but makes higher level escapes more frequent.

John Greensage, after '08 AZ States...he and I played pick up together and had plenty of discussion:

I can tell you now that very few players think in terms of attack strategies that span multiple exchanges within a point. For example, the double deep backhand attack - a normal lead followed by a deep backhand dump which must be played in the back half of the court (i.e. not just a front line low and slow timed backhand) is a great attack that few players use. Funny that I practically invented the attack (i.e. popularized it) for something that is so plain that anyone would assume it is just a standard play. We had zero people use it against us this tournament, and I can not remember anyone ever using it against me in tournament play (but they have in pick-up). One of the big advantages of this attack (besides being different and scoring a lot, and being easy to throw in) is that if the opponents do escape, often they come back with a weak attack that allows me to front tip and then attack from the front line. Unfortunately, the first part of this attack has been so successful that the back half has not come into play as much as I would have imagined.

I like to play mental games in slow motion - more like chess than high speed. That way I can visualize the wind, trace the throws, see what position the back takes during the play, imagine

what the back and front see (and think). For example, seeing how the front grabs the disc or positions for the tip, and what throw the front is forced to make with the wind on top of the disc or under it is very interesting.

Imagine the wind from your right, throw an off-side two-finger doubling shot. The opposing front moves from the power corner, catches thumbs up right handed, throws a righty wrist flip. For him the wind is underneath it. It can sail out. Same play with the off-side low. That wrist flip starts to deform and gets either angular or bouncy. Both result in more throws going out.

Now try this again with different opponents and different wind speeds and different wind angles (i.e. blowing up wind and from the right). How low does that off-side two-finger doubling shot need to be to force some out-of-bounds wrist flips? It is different for different players. Knowing the height across these situations lets you enlarge your target window so you do not need to force a better throw than is needed to get the job done. It is a case of dueling percentage shots.

As to all of the many things to think about in DDC: what I haven't mentioned is that this is hard. There is almost and endless amount to think about just in terms of court position versus the doubler (throwing the doubling shot) based on throwing talent, current streak, wind, surface (grass and wetness). This can use 100% of available brainpower and still not get done exactly right. I find I make two or 3 significant positioning errors a game, and twice as many minor ones. At some point you elect to give up some focus on one thing to capture the lion's share in another area. I think it is very cool that so much is going on as to need to make these sorts of trade-offs during play.

Few people adjust their serves properly. The non-initiating team should serve lower and mid court -- they don't need the hang time or court depth for the risk.

Over tipping is probably the #1 problem with most fronts. Why tip? Really, I mean why? The escape is the first concern. Improving the subsequent attack is a much lower priority....

If the disc is below the knees, throw it!! You should refine it for clock and counter, as well as wind condition. Personally, I look a long time at the lead as front. If it is heavily angled or flat? Flat leads, means an easy escape. Why take chances? If it is steep and coming down hard, then the escape is challenging. A quick release has a bit higher chance of resulting in being doubled. Bias a bit more towards tipping.

Dave Hesselberth on Risk Profile and Strategy:

There is always a balance to be struck between risk and consistency – also known as risk / reward ratio. I have been developing the concept of a risk profile – how much risk can you, or should you, take in different situations.

The two primary adjustors to your risk profile are the des and your own court position. Other factors which may also play a factor include the skill of your opponents relative to your own, the grass length conditions, and the wind and / or sun. Generally speaking the factors which raise or lower my risk profile are:

1. Des – Des raises my acceptable risk.
2. Court position – Farther forward raises acceptable risk, farther back lowers it.
3. Wind – higher wind reduces my risk profile since it increases my own risk on aggressive shots.

4. Grass conditions – taller grass allows you to raise your profile; low grass / hard ground should make you dial it back.
5. Opponent skill – high level opponents may force you to increase your risk profile at selected points.

My goal is to throw clearing shots that are aimed at the 3/4 mark in the court with 95% success. This leaves a 1/4 court margin of error and generally keeps your opponent behind mid-court – remember they will usually catch it somewhere in front of the potential landing point. You need to be able to do this over and over with rarely an error. Some errors will leave your opponent in the front half of the court which gives the other team an advantage but does not automatically give them a point and so are not catastrophic unless repeated often. Throwing short rather than long some of the time means that my success rate in throwing in the court may be somewhat higher than 95%, but my measuring stick for consistency is so important because the remaining errors will often give a point or points to your opponents w/o any effort on their part.

I aim to throw attack shots which are at least 90% consistent (whether I meet this goal or not is another issue). There are many ways to measure this, the simplest of which is to count throws which are in the court. You should be able to attack in a long rally without great fear of throwing out. Your primary goal is to make your opponents escape by throwing with good timing. Your secondary goal is to make the escape more difficult by making your opponents (one or both) move to play the escape. A clean winner is great when you get it, but too many players go for outright winners all the time and increase their unforced errors to a point where it is detrimental. Also keep in mind that a clean winner generally only results in one point scored where a perhaps more effective attack has a better potential for two points. For a more advanced accounting you might factor in how close your throw is to your intended target – did your throw go where you aimed it.

Generally, my risk profile (my acceptable risk) goes up appreciably when on Des and increases further depending on court position. When it is our Des I become more prone to aggressive play as my opponents leave me closer and closer to the front of the court. Aggressive is a relative thing here because you won't typically see any difference in my play until those factors all reach a tipping point – at that point I become terminally aggressive. My goal is for my throw to be terminal at least 75% of the time. This means that I want the point to be over... I don't want the other team to catch my throw on the front line in perfect position to return the attack. A 50% success rate (outright winner) is acceptable at this point, if I am unsuccessful it is now the other team's Des and we gained the advantage of first attack, if I am successful we just "stole" a point from the other team and it remains our Des.

The more difficult the wind conditions (and other factors) become the more I will dial back the risk profile. Since unforced errors are such a big part of the game, I will reduce them by throwing safer and aiming at the absolute middle of the court. If the other team is taking too much advantage of the court position I'm giving them then I need to dial it up a little and risk throwing out the back of the court occasionally to force them to attack from farther back in the court. The worse the conditions get the more I want to force the other team to play thereby putting the risk on them and the less risk I want to take on myself.

An attack may be low-percentage because the conditions are difficult for the shot (the wind is under the flight plate), you are too deep in the court, or it is too easy to tip. To restate that last part, a high-percentage throw if it is too easy to tip may be considered a low-percentage attack.

Unforced errors and court position are easily the biggest factors in high-level matches. And an argument can be made that your opponent's superior court position is due to your unforced errors... short throws, bad timing on attacks, easily tipped attacks. Unforced errors tend to fall into two categories, bad throws and bad tips. Since we've already talked about bad throws, let's talk about tipping.

Tips, especially for a back should be thought of as almost automatic. "Automatic" means that very few errors should occur and the disc will be well controlled – if I have to take more than a few steps to catch my tip then I am not happy. And if I am not controlling my tips properly then it is likely that I was out of position prior to making my defensive call. Proper control also allows you to tip forward to improve your court position and even to tip out of your partner's way as he is playing the doubling shot. Note that when I talk about tipping forward I'm not talking about a big tip, I'm talking about a just above head height tip that travels forward because you were moving forward when you contacted it – the disk moves with you as you take 2 or 3 steps. And of course that starts with good court position. Good defensive court position as a back allows you to see the developing play better allowing you to make better calls, it allows you to make better tips, and it puts you in position to milk and still often see what your partner is doing.

I tend to think of front tips as automatic as well, although I expect to miss more front tips than back. There is a point of diminishing returns with front tips. As the throws get harder, lower and more off-center, the likelihood of a successful tip goes down dramatically. Proper technique and hand-positioning can increase your odds tremendously, but if you are struggling to just get a hand on the disk or the throw is below your thighs then you should probably be doing a catch and throw. The least used (except by top players) but most effective catch-throw for low burns is two handed thumbs down (fingers in the rim) with a throwing grip allowing you to flip it away with a back-hand either left or right handed.

Court position consists of two parts, where you leave your opponents in their court and where you stand to defend your court. We've already discussed leaving your opponents behind mid-court, but how do you defend your own court?

The front should stand more or less in the middle of the front line about 2 paces back. If your opponent dumps a lot you may choose to start one step further back... if your opponents never dump then you can take a step forward. Generally you want to take one step toward your opponents stronger attack side, but you may cover even further over depending on your opponent's strengths and weaknesses. Watch your opponent's grip to get an idea where the throw is likely to go, but always (almost) set your feet prior to the throw and wait for it. This forces your opponent to beat you outright with a superior throw and allows you to be in the best position to cover the most court.

The back should begin moving back and to the side of the throw before the throw is even released. You want to move far enough to the side that you can see the lead disc and watch the second thrower with only slight movements of your head. If you decide to tip you will be in a position to step forward and close the distance to your disc very quickly. If you decide to milk you can move sideways and still often see what your partner is doing or at least see enough to know the timing of their tip or play. If I decide early to milk due to proximity of the attack I will set up to catch at the ground and usually be able to see my partner right over the top of my disc. If he tips I can catch/throw very quickly by catching on the rim; if he catches and my disc is too low I simply open up and let my disc fall to avoid the double.

Good players tend to look relaxed, in control, and patient. Cultivating this attitude is important so that you learn to take your time. As players learn and improve there is a tendency to learn to throw as fast as possible, but that focus would be better spent by learning to catch with a throwing grip ready to throw. Quick throws don't have to look rushed. It is critical that the front learn to take enough time to throw consistently in the court. It is the back's responsibility to give the front enough time to throw – the back can correct for a bad call or bad tip by letting the disc fall, but he cannot correct for a bad throw by the front.

Consistency is the single most important aspect of this game:

Consistently...

1. Throw deep, but don't worry about pinning the other team on the back line.
2. Serve deep, but you should ***never*** serve out the back. Serve is a freebie throw.
3. Attack in the court I. Minimize unforced errors and make the other team escape.
4. Attack in the court II. A $\frac{3}{4}$ attack that lands where you aim is often more effective than full power.
5. Move the other players around the court and vary your attacks.
6. Play the odds I. You ***can*** make that off-side winner from mid-court but ***should*** you? And how consistently?
7. Play the odds II. If a particular attack rarely results in points for you then go with another attack.
8. Lead where your partner can attack. Take enough time to give a good lead.
9. Be more aggressive when it is your Des and more patient when it is the other team's Des.
10. Control your tips. Control is much more important than tipping it high.
11. Be patient. Wait for a good attack. Take your time when playing your own escape.