

the  
**CrossFit**  
JOURNAL ARTICLES

## Got Rings? Now What?

Roger Harrell



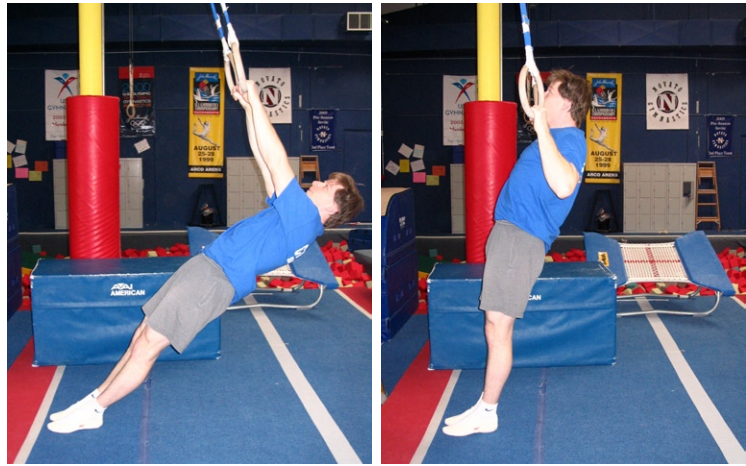
Because of constant pestering from the CrossFit community, you have now acquired a pair of rings. So, now what? You know what a muscle-up is, maybe you can do some dips on the things, but there's got to be more, right? Absolutely! A pair of rings has limitless possibilities for training. Common exercises take on a whole new dimension when performed on the rings, and many ring exercises can be performed nowhere else.

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## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Ring rows

A ring row is an excellent beginner drill to progress an individual toward pull-ups. Start with the rings at just above shoulder height. Grab the rings and lean back until your arms are straight, to place tension on the straps. Keep your body straight and tight and pull your shoulders to the rings. As strength increases, simply lower the rings so that your body is closer to being horizontal when you lean back.

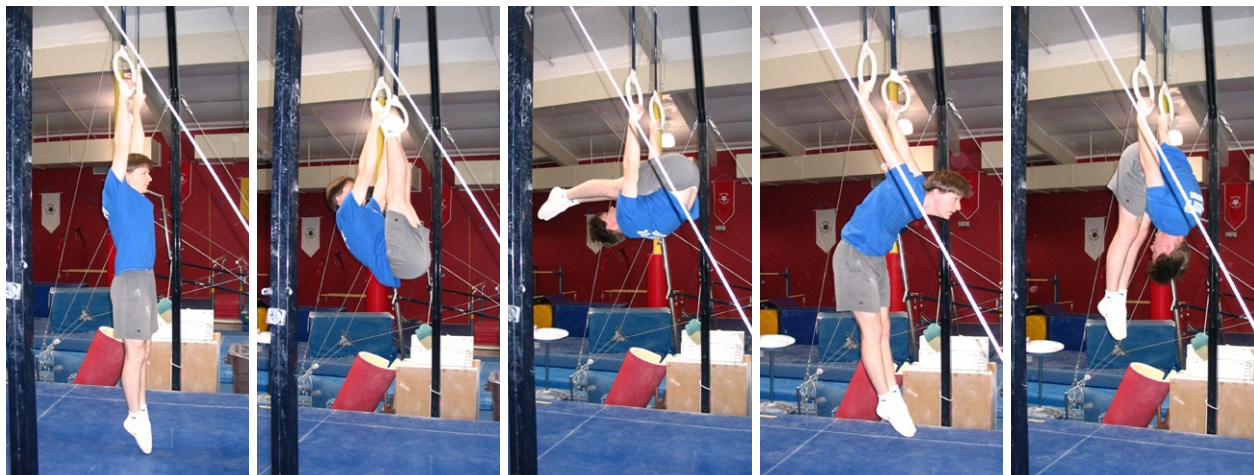


### Hang pull-through to skin the cat pull-out

A hang pull-through to skin the cat pull-out is a sequence of movements that works basically every muscle group from the mid-thigh up, while providing an excellent shoulder stretch as well. Starting in a hang and keeping your arms and legs straight, lift your toes up and back overhead, through a piked inverted hang. Then, continue to lower your toes slowly toward the floor behind you. This hanging position is called a skin the cat. At first you will want to practice this movement with the rings low enough so that you will be able to touch the floor with your feet as you lower toward the skin the cat position. This will enable you to safely get a feel for the movement. From the skin the cat position, lift your hips and pull out back through a piked inverted hang and lower to hang. Once you have some experience, you can raise the rings and lower into the skin the cat clear of the floor and then pull back out.



Try to relax your shoulders at the bottom of the skin the cat to get a good stretch and truly find the bottom of your skin the cat. This skill works as an excellent part of a warm-up, or can be used in a conditioning set when done for repetitions—even if you find one or two reps easy, they add up quickly as part of a workout.



## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Straight-body inverted hang

Straight-body inverted hangs require balance and constant stabilization. Simply hanging upside down with your toes pointed toward the ceiling will be a challenge for many people unfamiliar with being upside down. This drill helps to develop balance and control while inverted and also strengthens the rotator cuffs due to the constant stabilization required.

### Pull-ups

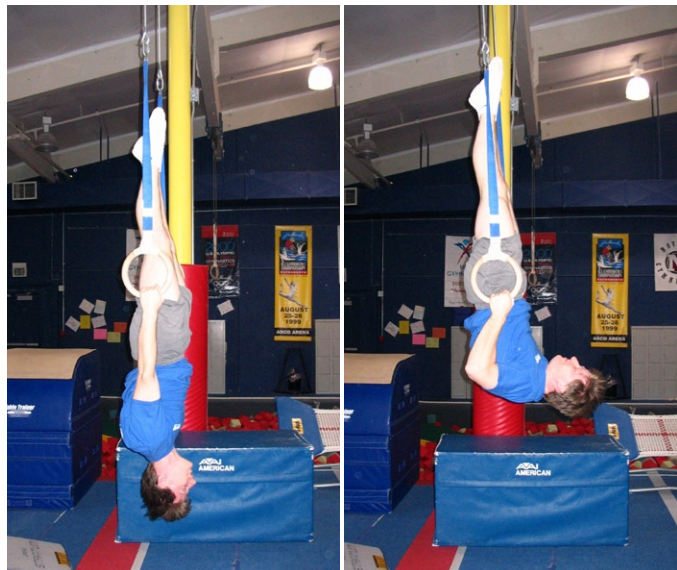
Pull-ups on the rings are more difficult than bar pull-ups for some, and easier for others. Some people who are unable to do pull-ups on a bar due to limited shoulder flexibility are able to do full range of motion pull-ups on rings. The freedom of movement allows the shoulders to align themselves in a comfortable way while doing the exercise.

### Inverted pull-ups

Inverted pull-ups combine the stabilization requirements of an inverted hang with the conditioning load of a regular pull-up. Starting in a piked or straight-body inverted hang, pull up as high as you can and return to the start position. Be sure to practice these in both the straight and pike positions.

### Pull-up to lever

A pull-up to lever sequence is a good starting point for developing a front lever. Starting in a bent-arm hang and keeping your body straight and tight, lift your toes and push the rings away to a front lever, then return to a bent-arm hang. The key to this exercise is to lift and push into the lever. Do not allow your shoulders to drop as your legs lift. Keep your shoulders as high as possible and push the rings downward. This makes the motion significantly easier and helps develop proper technique for the front lever.



*Inverted pull-ups in straight-body (top) and pike (bottom) positions.*



*Pull-up to lever*

## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Back lever

A back lever is the easiest straight-body strength move in gymnastics. From a piked inverted hang, push your toes out directly toward the wall until you are just barely able to hold the position. Return to the pike. Work the back lever and push your limits until you are able to stop your body parallel with the ground. It is essential to actively tense your entire body when executing this skill. Squeeze your arms tight and press the rings inward, while simultaneously squeezing your heels together and keeping your butt tight. Finally, lower into the skin the cat and pull back up to inverted hang with a straight body.



Back lever

### Straight-body pull to skin the cat pull-out

A straight-body pull to skin the cat pull-out is identical to the hang pull to skin the cat pull-out with the exception that it will be done with a straight, rather than piked, body. With straight arms and a straight body, pull through a front lever to inverted hang, continue through back lever, and lower to skin the cat. Lift your heels and pull out, keeping your body straight, then roll through an inverted hang, lower through front lever, and return to hang.

### Front lever

There are several steps to help develop a front lever

Step 1: Tucked front lever. Try to hold your torso parallel with the ground with both legs tucked. Be sure your arms are straight.

Step 2: Single leg front lever. Hold a front lever with one leg straight and the other leg bent so that your foot is next to your knee. Be sure to switch which leg is bent.

Step 3: Straddle front lever. Hold a front lever with your legs straddled as wide as possible. Gradually, bring your legs closer together as you build strength.

Step 4: Front lever. Following the above drills will bring you to the point where you can hold a stable, legs-together front lever.



Straight-body pull to skin the cat pull-out

## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### The support

A basic requirement for ring work is to obtain a solid, proper support in which your arms are straight, hips open, and chest up. The rings should be turned out between 15 and 45 degrees so that the insides of your elbows are facing forward. Before moving on to presses, rolls, or any other support work, you should be able to hold this position for a minimum of 15 seconds with little to no movement.

### Push-ups

Start with the rings at about waist height. Perform push-ups on the rings. As strength increases, lower the rings until they are just above the floor; then, to make them more challenging, you can elevate your feet a little. To further increase difficulty, lean forward a little bit while you do the push-ups so that at the bottom of the push-up your hands are right next to your hips.

### Dips

Perform dips just as you would on the parallel bars. At first, do whatever it takes to get the dips done. As your support gets stronger, work toward doing the dips with the rings turned out (palms forward) in the proper support position described above.

### L-sit

See issue 42 (February 2006) of the CrossFit Journal for progressions for an L-sit. The progressions on parallettes and rings are the same. The only stipulation on rings is that the arms and shoulders in the ring support should not change as you lift into the L-sit. Rings should still be turned out, and your head and chest up.



OK support (left) and Better support (right)



Standard dip (left) and Turned-out dips (right)

## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Hollow body training

Set up matting for this exercise. Set the rings a couple inches above the mat. Start in a push-up position, with hands on the rings and feet on the floor. Push the rings forward, maintaining a hollow body position, then pull back to a push-up position. Once this sequence is developed, you can continue past the push-up position and push the rings back toward your hips to work the planche position as well. Once some strength in the

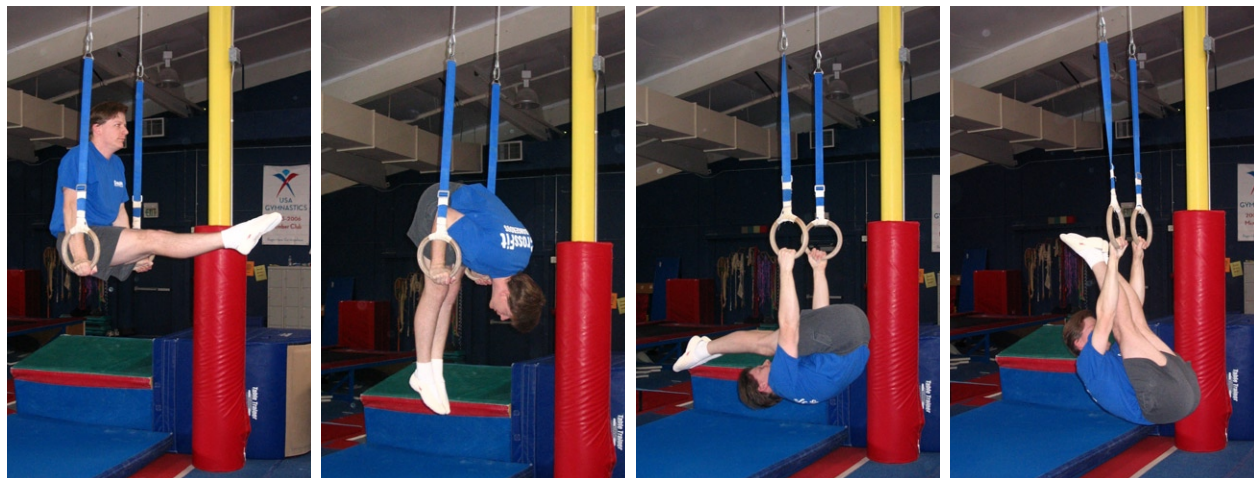
planche position has been developed, you can try, from the planche position, to push the rings out to the side a little and allow your body to drop down between your hands to train the maltese. Arms should be kept straight throughout this sequence. If you have to bend your arms to complete a motion, then start over and go only as far as you can while maintaining straight arms.



### Forward roll to inverted hang

From an L-sit in support, lift your hips up behind you and bend your arms. Try to lift your hips up over your head. Once completely inverted, roll forward and let the rings turn out and you will end up in a piked inverted hang. In starting and teaching this skill, be sure to lift your hips at the beginning and do not dive your chest

forward. This is a very common mistake and can lead to injury. It should be a very controlled lifting motion. The roll only occurs once the hips are directly above the head. If you can not reach this position, do not try to roll out—just lower your hips and return to support. When first learning the skill, be sure to use a spotter.

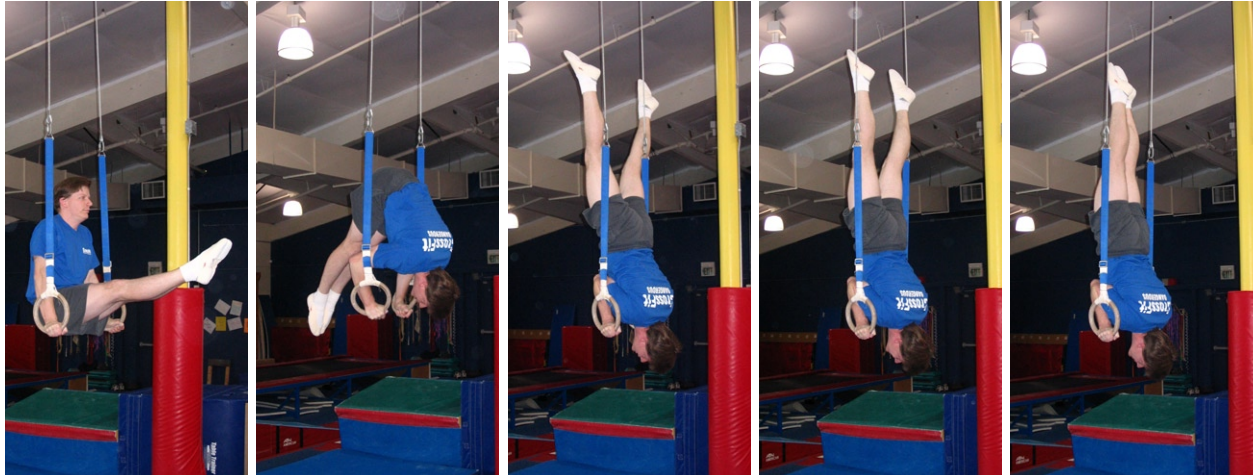


## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Shoulder stand

Initiate a press to shoulder stand just like you did for the forward roll: start in an L-sit and lift your hips until they are directly over your head, but, now, instead of rolling forward, straddle and lift your legs until they hit the cables. Use the cables for stability and get comfortable in this position. If you fall too far forward, just roll out. Once you are stable upside down, you can bring your feet

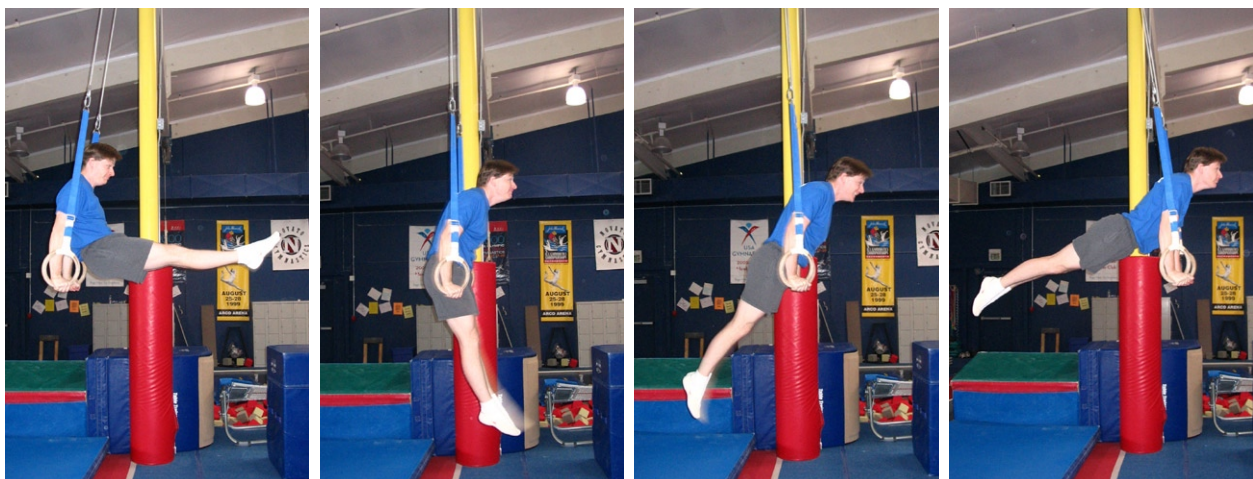
to the insides of the cables for minimal assistance, then bring your legs together and balance the shoulder stand free of the cables. Once you have a sense of the balance, try to press into the shoulder stand keeping your legs together throughout, then balance the shoulder stand, then lower back to support.



### Support swings

While maintaining a good support position, swing forward and backward. At first, it will be very difficult to maintain stability. Keep the rings turned out and try to keep your body straight. Resist the temptation to

lift your toes and pike the hips in the front swing. Swing with your whole body straight. This exercise will greatly stabilize your support and build strength.



## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Bent-arm press to handstand

A bent-arm press to handstand is similar in technique to the press to shoulder stand. Start in an L-sit, and then lift your hips to the back and push the rings forward. When your hips are as close to directly above your shoulders as you can get them, straddle and lift your legs to the cables. Push your arms straight to reach a handstand. Once you have reached a handstand, work

on stabilization and moving your feet to the insides of the cables. Try to then turn the rings out. The rings should be parallel with each other. Once this position is stable, try to hold the handstand free of the cables. Again, if you fall forward, simply roll out. As your press to handstand gets stronger, work toward performing the press with straight arms.



### Muscle-up

A muscle up is simply a combination of a pull-up and a dip, with the addition of a nasty little transition. A proper false grip and technique are essential to achieving the muscle up. For the false grip, place your hands in the position that they will be in when you reach the support. This means that your palms need to be on top of the inside of the rings from the beginning. To learn the false grip, place the rings at a bit below shoulder height. Open your hand completely and place the ring so it runs from the crook of your thumb to the opposite heel of your hand. Then grasp the ring and lower yourself down to hang from it. Once you have a good sense of the grip and can hang with both hands in false grips you can begin working toward the muscle-up. Start with the rings low

so you can use your legs to assist yourself through the motion. When you are below the rings in the hang, you will want to have your legs a little bit in front of you. This will allow you to rotate over the rings through the transition. Start the pull and roll your shoulders over your hands, keeping your hands and elbows close to your body. Your elbows should travel in curves that are parallel with each other; they should not point outward at all. Once your shoulders are up over your hands, push up to support. Once you have a sense of the motion, try to do it without the leg assist. Think about pulling aggressively, getting through the transition quickly. As your muscle-up develops, you will find yourself able to hop through the transition.





## Got Rings? Now What? (continued...)

### Backward roll to support

A backward roll to support combines kinesthetic awareness, inversion, and great strength demands. Start from a hang with a false grip, pull your legs up and forward, roll over backward and push into a support.

The keys to this skill are similar to those for a muscle-up: keep a good false grip, and keep the rings close to your body.



### Kip to support

Start in a straight-body inverted hang. Pike down, and then quickly kick upward. Once your body has fully extended, sit up and try to catch up to your legs while pushing down on the rings. As you roll forward, keep pressure on the rings and finish in a support. The kipping motion can be practiced on a mat. Begin by lying on your back in a pike with your hands pointed toward the ceiling. Your weight should be on your upper back

and shoulders. Kick your legs up and extend, then snap forward. There will be a moment when you are completely off the ground. Try to reach back with your hands and catch yourself in a rear support before your feet hit the ground.



Roger Harrell is a former competitive gymnast with twenty years of experience in the sport. He has continued to train in the sport well beyond his competitive years. He has run several competitive gymnastics training programs and currently focuses on coaching adults and bringing the benefits of gymnastics to those outside the usual community. He is the developer, designer, and webmaster of [www.DrillsAndSkills.com](http://www.DrillsAndSkills.com).