

The background of the cover features a stack of cut logs. A large log is on the left side, with a pocket knife stuck into its surface. Another pocket knife is positioned vertically in the center, its blade pointing downwards. The title text is overlaid on a dark horizontal band across the middle of the image.

# KNIFE THROWING LIKE THE PROS

A double-bit axe with a wooden handle is positioned vertically on the right side of the cover. The axe head is weathered and metallic.

THROWING TECHNIQUES,  
KNIVES & AXES, RULES,  
MENTAL PREPARATION  
& MORE

PETER

KRAMER

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### **A Note about Informality**

Since knife throwers are used to addressing each other informally, this book also uses informal colloquial language. Knife throwers are a community, and the reader is cordially invited to participate in it.

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## Alternate Grip Variants

Knife throwing is an extremely versatile and multifaceted kind of sport. This can be seen in the diverse possibilities of holding a knife prior to launch. You already know two different variants of holding your knife before throwing it: the side pinch and the hammer grip. The basic difference between the two is the position of your thumb on the knife handle's backside with the hammer grip, resulting in a distinct slowdown of the rotational speed. Additionally, there is the turn of your hand through almost 90 degrees. Apart from this there are other variations, but these can be deduced from the fact that some knife models hardly allow any other technique.



### The “Pinch” Grip

The pinch grip is another of the “classics” you might have already seen. Some knives are so small that you may want to grab them only between your thumb and the joint of your index finger. This technique not only is very energy sapping but also leads to knife rotations that are so fast that they can hardly be controlled.

In September 2007 I was asked by the *Galileo* show of the TV channel ProSieben to throw small steak knives, carpenter nails, and



The “pinch grip” is a classic way of holding a knife and is especially used with small knives. Take care of your fingers in case the blade is sharpened.

screwdrivers, among other things, to make the show somewhat more colorful for viewers; out of necessity I had to throw these items by means of the pinch grip. I did not see any other option, but luckily this worked out well.

## The “Clamp” Grip

Whoever doesn't like the pinch grip as an alternative can use the “clamp” grip, also called the “horizontal blade” grip. This is especially well suited for light blades and preferably for knives with a sharp edge, or knives whose edge is sharpened on both sides, as is often the case with combat knives or “tactical knives.”

Here the risk of injuring your hand is excluded, but training this type of throw is not easy. This kind of grip, with its specific way of

resting the thumb, leads to a significant slowdown of the knife's rotational speed. With a bit of training you may be able to decrease the turns of the knife to such an extent that at some time you will be able to throw a shorter knife from a distance of 16½ feet with just half a rotation.

Throwing this way takes a lot of exertion of back and shoulder and is not primarily done by a movement of the elbow. The knives hit the target with high speed but often stick in the wood in a somewhat chaotic manner because, during the short flight, they inevitably spin around their longitudinal axis. The reason for this is that with this technique, you throw the knife with its side surface facing forward and not just with the slim knife back.

According to the laws of aerodynamics, a flying body tries to find the position with the least drag and thus starts to spin around its longitudinal axis. This, too, is a reason why the clamp grip is suitable mainly for throwing over short distances. For me personally, together

The “clamp grip” is also called the “horizontal blade grip” and is especially suited for light throwing knives that also have one or two sharp blade edges.



with the purely aesthetic aspect, the accuracy of aiming is also diminished, so I don't want to use this technique in competitions. Nevertheless, it is interesting to know that this kind of technique exists.

## The “Wild West” Blade Throw

In case you are a western fan, you perhaps remember that the heroes of Wild West movies almost exclusively hold their knives by the blade when throwing. This kind of throwing I found extremely fascinating as an adolescent, especially since it looked somewhat “cool.” From today's point of view, the reason for the blade throw is easy to understand for utility knives: the handles of utility knives are often constructed ergonomically, with a finger guard or cross guard, as well as a pommel to prevent your hand from slipping. These parts make working with these knives easier but at the same time make launching the knife from the handle more difficult. On the other hand, the blade edges of these knives are usually ground to be very sharp, so I want to mention some specifics with respect to throwing them. After all, we don't want to unnecessarily turn into wholesale purchasers of Band-Aids.

To start training on blade throws, it is recommended to first throw with blunt throwing knives (such as the “Pro-Balance Thrower”), or with knives whose blades are not sharpened. At the same time I advise against using the hammer grip for the blade throw, because employing this technique will avoid hand injuries only when you're using a totally blunt knife for throwing.

But one thing is clear: as soon as the thrower wants to throw a sharp knife this way, he or she will inevitably cut their thumb or the

inside of other fingers. It doesn't matter at all in which way the thrower grabs the knife at the blade, since an injury is almost preprogrammed. Hence, please exclude this technique from your training and use the pinch grip, if possible, with the thumb resting at the blade's side.

Since you already know about the mutual dependence of distance and knife rotation, you can make your life a bit easier for the moment: for initially testing the blade throw, stand only 6½ feet from the target, meaning your knife has to do only about half a rotation.

You have already mastered the basic throw quite well; hence, throwing from a shorter distance is surely a trifle for you. But here the following technical aspect is important to still be able to throw knives with a sharp edge the same way in the future: always take care to hold the knife straight during launch, with the sharp edge facing outward, and never toward the palm of your hand!

If you do this wrong, the launch and the initial starting rotation of the knife easily lead to a cut on your hand. Also this way the knife will turn itself into the "right position," meaning the blunt back faces forward, as is the case with the throw with one rotation.

All this you can try out delightfully without any danger, by using a blunt throwing knife until you automatically do it right without having to think about it. During launch it is especially important to open your fingers during the flow of moves to avoid the sharp blade edge in case of a mishap.

With the "Wild West" blade throw, the launch can also best be described as letting the blade glide out of your hand. In principle this works according to the same rules as the usual throw with your hand on the knife's handle. Try this from a distance of 6½ feet and you will surely immediately be successful. What you are able to do from a distance of 10 feet should not be any problem at all for you from a distance of 6½ feet.

Everything described in this section of the chapter so far is only a preliminary exercise for things to come: the “Wild West” throw from a distance of 13 feet! For this you move about 3 feet behind your 10-foot marker and then throw the knife in exactly the same way as in the preliminary exercise, but now with an additional full rotation. The knife now rotates one and three-quarter times, but we throwers always round down, so we name this throw “1½ spin.”

This new throwing variant will also be a lot of joy for you after some tries. It is also of a certain relevance to train this variant, because in case you ever want to participate in an official contest, the so-called walk-back is of significance in the finals. “Walk-back” means here that a thrower doesn’t stay at a certain distance but after three successful throws has to walk back to the next distance farther away from the target.

For example, after three throws from a distance of 10 feet there immediately follow three more throws from a distance of 13 feet to



For “Wild West” throws, injuries of the throwing hand are almost preprogrammed because of the sharpened blade edge—regardless of which way the thrower holds the knife. Best to train with blunt, nonsharpened blades.

the target. Then the thrower has to move farther back to 16½ feet, 20 feet, and 23 feet. The walk-back is an extremely demanding task for the thrower and requires a high degree of experience, training, skill, and flexibility (more about this later in chapter 24, about contests and their rules).

## The “No Spin” Grip

This throwing and grip variant is linked to a very interesting throwing technique. Especially within the school of Russian and Asian throwers, decades ago there were thoughts about whether it is possible to throw a knife in such a way that it doesn't rotate during flight, and this way one may be able to be totally independent of distance measurements.

“Instinctive throwing” was called into being—the “no spin” technique (= no rotation). But how is this supposed to work at all? As we know, the lever relations of the human body inevitably lead to the knife's rotation after launch; sometimes slow, sometimes faster. How can this rotation be avoided?

Short answer: it can't be avoided completely, because in the end the knife still turns, but it turns extremely slowly. As you already know from the hammer grip technique, the thrower needs a kind of counterbearing during launch to slow down the rotation. With the hammer grip, this counterbearing is the thumb resting on the backside of the knife's handle, and thus the knife rotates slower and more sluggishly in the air.

This counterbearing principle with the “no spin” technique is virtually carried to its extremes, because here the index finger is put

down in a similar way—but now on the knife handle’s top side. Swinging the knife backward takes place with the ball of your hand facing forward and with a very flexible wrist that gets totally blocked at launch. As soon as the knife’s rotation is about to start, the “index finger action” takes over and provides an effective countermeasure by means of a “backspin,” which implies that counterpressure is acting on the knife handle while you let go of the knife.

If you ever tried to throw a flat stone in such a way that it skips on the surface of a lake several times, you automatically exerted a comparable backspin on the stone by means of your snapping wrist and via your index finger. In this way the initiated knife rotation is countered to such an extent that some well-trained “no-spinners” are able to throw their knives from a distance of more than 33 feet practically without any rotation. With this throwing technique the knife’s rotation always struggles against the backspin caused by one’s index finger.



The “no spin” grip doesn’t cause any rotation of the knife and makes the throw independent of any distance, but the technique is complicated and hard to learn.

This looks very impressive with masters of this skill, but I don't want to hide the fact that this skill not only is extremely difficult to learn but also needs a very high amount of training. Even experienced contest sport throwers (and I don't exclude myself from this!) may sometimes almost become despaired when training this throwing technique.

In the overall-precision competitions of international contests, so far only a single sport thrower has participated with this technique. One reason may be that this throwing variant is a bit less precise with respect to aiming than the usual rotational throwing technique. This is comprehensible, because the index finger serving as a counterbearing may during launch inadvertently lead the knife in an unwanted direction. Besides that, the important and stabilizing kinetic energy of the rotation is missing.

In this context I would like to remark that “no spin” doesn't work equally well with any knife. For example, my competition knives have a weight of 21½ ounces each at an overall length of 15 inches. These can't be slowed down by any index finger at the moment of launch. Suitable for no-spin throwing are especially smaller knives with a length of about 10 to 11 inches.

Meanwhile, a kind of “no-spin hype” has started—apart from actual competitions—which I don't share. For aesthetic reasons I already like it when my knives rotate in the air like a boomerang and then stick in the target tip first as if by magic.

Besides that, with many throwers of this discipline the “no spin” trajectory of thrown weapons often looks quite chaotic, because the knives frequently flutter or rotate around their longitudinal axes but only rarely fly straight forward like an arrow. This is caused by the lack of kinetic rotational energy, which stabilizes the trajectory of conventional throws with rotation. Another reason is that a knife

doesn't have any aerodynamic characteristics, in contrast to a dart, crossbow arrow, or spear.

Last but not least, I don't really like the designs, shapes, and looks of most "no spin" knives. They rather remind me of a dentist's tools, tent stakes, and scalpels. But this is also a question of individual taste.

Nevertheless, the "no spin" technique in any case is a very interesting facet of knife throwing and another instance of "to each his own." There is no "right" or "wrong" here, but rather a "one way or the other." In any case, I wish you much joy with trying and especially lots of patience. You will need it!

Russian Yuri Fedin (who unfortunately died much too early in spring 2015) took "no spin" to a certain perfection I ungrudgingly concede. His teaching videos about the "Fedin style" can still be admired on the internet, and thus Yuri is immortal at least in this way. There are also a couple of excellent "no-spinners" within the German and international communities of throwers whose tutorials in the internet are very well crafted and demonstrate the technique clearly.

In this context I have to add a few well-meaning words of warning I simply can't suppress. Some followers of the "no spin" technique like to mention a special and additional aspect as a "positive" argument for their style of throwing: "Throwing knives in this way turns throwing into a reliable tool for self-defense, since the distance to the opponent doesn't have any technical relevance anymore." Well, more about that in the next chapter.