



# The Stanford Quads Newsletter



Sunday, November 18, 2007

Edited by Bill van Melle

*Welcome to the Stanford Quads! This newsletter is published at irregular intervals to fill you in on square dance lore and even pass along actual news when there is some.*

## Administrivia

We won't be dancing on Thanksgiving weekend. You'll just have to work off that turkey some other way...

As you depart for home at the end of class, please leave your badge at the back table. That way, we spare you the burden of trying to remember where you left it come next Sunday.

Fairmeadow School prohibits smoking *anywhere* on the campus (not just indoors). Please help us maintain good relations with the school by refraining while here, or at least leaving the school boundaries before lighting up.

If you have an email address and didn't give it to us when you signed up for the class, you're not on the class mailing list and thus are missing occasional useful and/or timely information. See someone at the back table to correct this oversight.

## Attendance

You are now on your way to becoming Modern Western Square Dancers. We want you to get the most possible out of this class. Back when you were in school, you were expected to attend all your classes, barring sickness or other emergencies. The same is pretty much true here. Two hours per week is not a lot of time to learn a complex new skill. If you arrive late, leave early, or miss a night altogether, you're cheating yourself out of valuable learning time. If you frequently have to miss more than one Sunday in a row, this class is probably not for you.

However, we realize this is the real world, and you have lives, so business trips, vacations and other distractions might cause you to miss a class. Let's talk about what steps you can take to minimize the impact of an absence. Even if you don't miss a class, you may find the following tips useful—some extra effort now will pay off handsomely in future dancing pleasure.

**Reviews.** We run a review session every Sunday before class, at 6:30, during which a club member reviews recently taught calls. If you miss a night, we expect you to attend the review the following Sunday, but anyone who wants a little extra practice is welcome to join in. The first such review session will be two weeks from tonight (Dec 2), so don't worry about all that tryptophan making you forget the calls you learn tonight.

Of course, you should feel free to ask for help at other times. At breaks during the class, club members will be happy to walk you through any call you find yourself confused about. The caller is also available for questions—you might give him ideas about something to work on during the next tip.

**Internet resources.** Our web site has a list of the new calls taught each week (see [www.mixed-up.com/quads](http://www.mixed-up.com/quads)). The definition linked to each call should give you at least a rough idea of how it works (even if you don't have seven other people to practice with); you can then come to the review session ready to dance them for real. Even if you don't miss a Sunday, reading thru this list at some point during the week might keep your memory fresh.

On our web site, you can also find a mini-calendar with upcoming events of interest, and assorted useful links.

[www.scvsda.org/learning.html](http://www.scvsda.org/learning.html) is a page maintained by the nearby Santa Clara Valley Square Dancers Association. Here you can find lists and definitions for all the calls you'll be learning in this class, plus yet more useful square dance links.

## Square Dance Etiquette

*Here are a few tips on square dance behavior—customs peculiar to square dancing, as well as common sense reminders to respect your fellow dancers.*

When squaring up, if your square needs more dancers, the convention is to hold up fingers indicating the number of couples needed. At a singles club such as ours, you may also see a bent or crossed finger requesting half a couple; however, the usual procedure is to find a partner *before* trying to form a square.

This is somewhat different from the usual convention in gay clubs, where they hold up fingers to indicate the number of *individuals* required, and you are not always expected to have lined up a partner before squaring up. Quads has been evolving in this direction in recent years, so we don't frown on people trying to square up singly. But be aware that if you go to other (straight) clubs, people *will* frown on this kind of behavior, so consider it good practice for the real world to locate a partner before squaring up.

By the way, at a club such as ours, if you arrived as a couple, there's no requirement that you dance that way all evening. Many people find it fun and even educational to dance with other partners. In fact, dancing much of the evening with other partners is the social norm outside the U.S.

After the tip is over, be sure to shake hands with the others in your square and thank them, instead of just walking away. [A *tip* is the time you spend dancing between breaks. More jargon in the next issue.]

If your square breaks down, try not to waste time being upset at yourself or anyone else. We all make mistakes sometimes, and square dancing is supposed to be fun, after all. If you stop to argue about who messed up, or exactly what went wrong, you'll miss even more calls, and you'll make it harder for the people still dancing to hear the calls. In the same vein, when your neighbor makes an error, do not push or shove him/her back into place—be more subtle.

Be sure to square up quickly after you've broken down—this allows the caller to easily see that you're not dancing, and he'll try to get the other squares back home quickly so you can resume dancing. This may also inspire him to explain the troublesome call more carefully, but if not, wait until the next break and ask somebody.

At many other clubs, it is traditional to “make lines” when you break down, conventionally done by squaring your set and having the Head couple slide over next to the Side couple, nudging them over to the right until you have nice facing lines. Now you can resume dancing at the next point where the caller says you have normal lines. You may not come out with your partner at the end this way, but at least you can keep dancing. At Quads, normal-sex lines occur less frequently, and John is usually good about resolving quickly when he sees you're down, so it's easier just to square up.

If the square doesn't break down, but for some reason you don't end up with your partner as you promenade home, just quietly find your way back home with your original partner anyway. (This advice doesn't apply to singing calls, where the caller deliberately rotates you through the other three possible partners.)

Use gentle handholds! It's important to establish hand contact with adjacent dancers in your formation, but you don't have to bruise them to do it. Handholds are an important way in which dancers guide each other, since no one can be alert every second; however, you should hold on loosely so the other dancers can get away if they are supposed to move and you don't realize it. When doing a **Left Allemande**, grip the forearm, not the elbow. When standing in an ocean wave (at least at clubs where waves are danced hands-up—we tend to dance them hands-down here), hold your palm and fingers gently against those of the adjacent dancer—don't grab thumbs. After you do a Left Allemande or Pull By (e.g., in **Right and Left Thru**), don't forget to let go as you pass each other.

Since square dancing involves a lot of close contact, you should, of course, bathe regularly and otherwise avoid grossing out your fellow dancers. And please don't ingest alcohol or other drugs that impair your coordination or memory before dancing.

## Club History

The Stanford Quads was conceived in the summer of 1983. It was patterned somewhat after MIT's Tech Squares, a club Victoria Pigman (now Gilbert) had belonged to. Victoria spent many hours over that summer convincing John Sybalsky to teach a beginners class, which started in October, 1983. That season saw a second class in the Spring, and since then we have run a new class every Autumn, making the current one our twenty-sixth. We used to dance in the Old Union ballroom on the Stanford campus, but we lost that hall in the Pretty Big Quake of '89. We also used to be an official ASSU-affiliated organization, but now we're an independent anarchy.

Our name, “Stanford Quads,” was chosen by a vote in early 1984. The only close runner-up was “Cardinal Squares”. We commissioned Scott Kim to do the logo that you see on the red club badges.

## Hand Positioning

You may never have thought about hand positioning when dancing; you just grab the other person's hand. However, for smooth dancing you really need to have some agreement about whether to hold your palm up or down when you are side-by-side. For some reason, the tendency out in the real world is that men put their palms up and women put theirs down, so very likely when you squared up the first night this is what you did. However, as you may have noticed, this generalization breaks down when you have two women or two men together in a couple, as often happens over the course of a dance.

At most clubs, what happens is the men put palms up, the women put palms down, and the infrequent same-sex couples fight about it, with the more insistent one winning. Most dancers in the Advanced and Challenge community have adopted a more sensible convention, which we follow at Quads: always put your right hand palm up and your left palm down. While this handhold may seem awkward at first, shortly it will become second nature, and it never fails: your palm-up right hand will match perfectly with the next dancer's palm-down left hand. The major exception seems to be **Circle Right/Left**, where people generally prefer to hold both hands in the same direction. There is also some dispute over **Single Circle to a Wave** [a call we'll get to later], which is best done beau palms up, belle palms down, but there is much variance. At any rate, be aware that when you go to a hoedown, people from other clubs are likely to have “men palm up, women palm down, fight about it when necessary” habits.