

How to Cast in Scottish Country Dancing

Introduction

This “how-to” guide covers the concept of “Casting”, and the different types of Casting, as this has often lead to some confusion in classes and needs more thought.

“Casting” is actually a generic term for a number of similar figures which involve dancing out of the side of the set and progressing a number of places along the set, either up, down or occasionally across. The large variety of entrances and exits (transitions) into the figure are often never taught explicitly in class.

So, in case I never manage to teach it successfully in a class, here is a written tutorial, with diagrams and the correct RSCDS parlance for a variety of common types of casting. I don't think I have captured them all, but certainly the ones a beginner/intermediate dancer might need to know.

Recap of Basic Terminology:

- The “Top” of the set is where the 1s are at the start of the dance (and the teacher, and the music).
- The “Bottom” of the set is where the 3s and 4s are.
- “Up” means “towards the top of the set”
- “Off” or “Down” means “towards the bottom of the set”

The Basic “Casting off” Figure – “Cast off one place (2 steps)”

The RSCDS “Manual of Scottish Dancing” gives the following official description:

For first couple, in their starting position in the set to cast off into second place:

Steps: 2 travelling steps, one on the right foot and one on the left foot (2 bars)

Bar 1: 1st couple face the top of the set and dance outward, the woman to the right and the man to the left

Bar 2: 1st couple dance down behind 2nd couple into second place

I illustrate this in Figure 1 below (Top of the set is at the bottom of the diagram as this is drawn from the teacher's perspective). Note that the 2nd Couple will normally step up out of the way on the **inside** of the set, to change places with the first couple.

Whilst I illustrate this figure from first place, it can equally be done from 2nd or 3rd places in exactly the same way.

A dance containing this basic form of casting off is “The Machine Without Horses” (Book 12) where it is preceded by a “setting” figure to complete the 4 bar phrase. The setting is completed on the spot in bars 1 and 2, the casting is performed in bars 3 and 4.

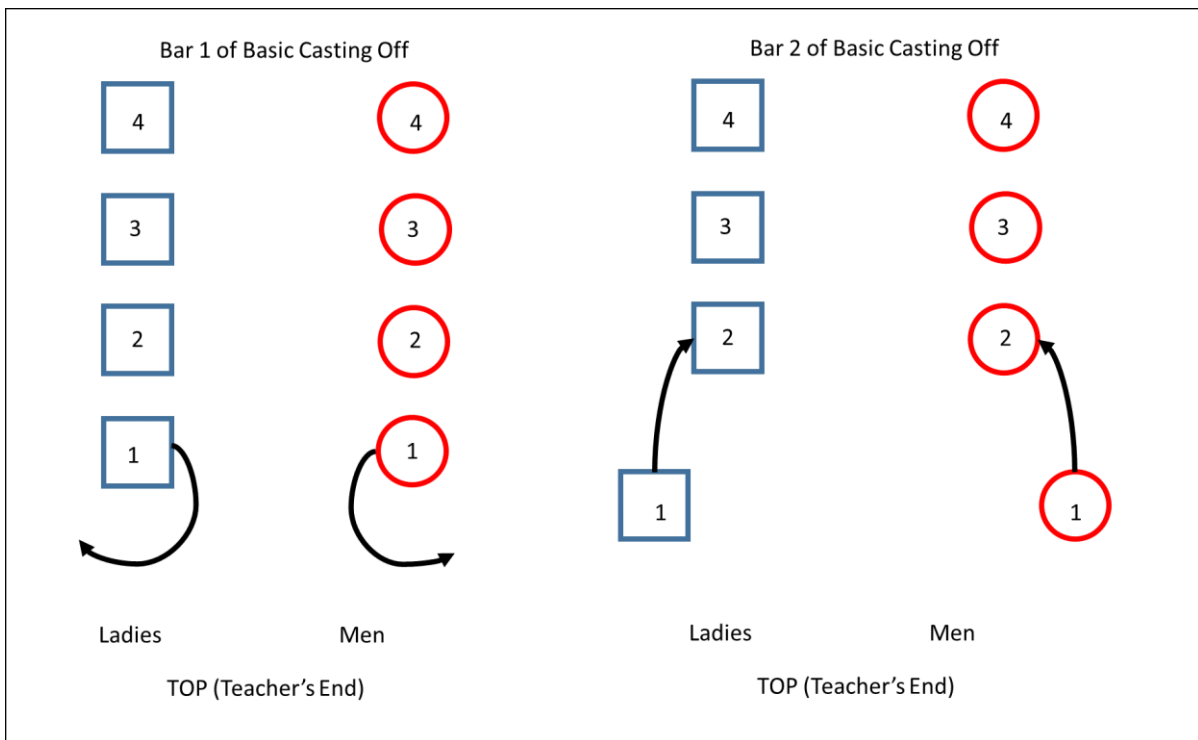


Figure 1: Basic Casting Off

Cast off 2 or more places

Casting off 2 or more places is also a common figure, for example in “Corn Rigs” (Bk 4). The first bar is danced as for the basic cast above. The remaining bars in the figure (either 1 or 3 bars) is used to travel down behind the sidelines to the required place.

Casting Off 1 Place in 4 Bars (Colloquial: “Slow Cast”)

This is very similar to the basic cast, but takes 4 bars rather than 2. The breakdown is as follows:

- Bar 1: 1st couple dance in to meet partner and face up.
- Bar 2: 1st couple dance outward back to their own sides.
- Bar 3: 1st couple dance down behind 2nd couple.
- Bar 4: 1st couple dance into second place.

This is illustrated in Figure 2 below. 2nd couple usually step up on bars 3 and 4.

The best known dance containing this figure is the ever popular “Highland Rambler” (Leeds Silver Jubilee book). Another example is in the dance “Inchmickery”

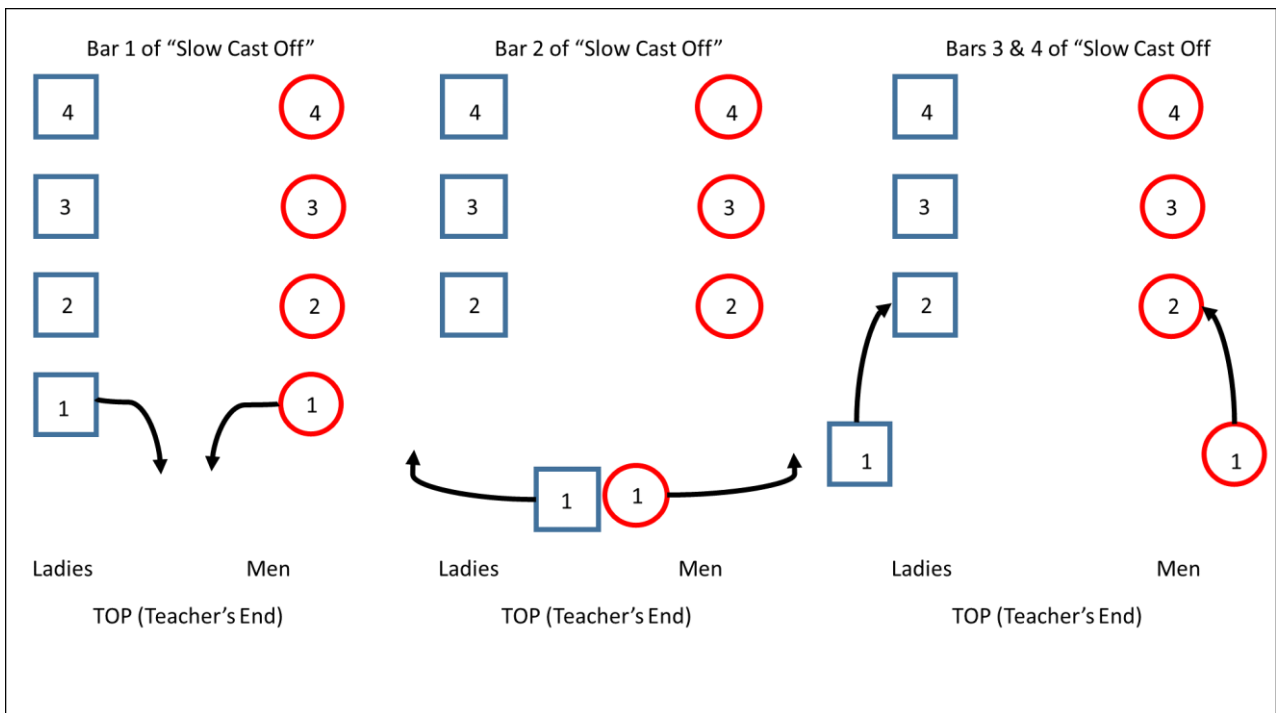


Figure 2: Illustration of “Cast off in four bars” (“Slow Cast”)

“Cast Off” After “Cross”, “Cross Giving Right Hands” or “Cross Up”

The difference between this figure and the basic one is that at the start of the figure you are already facing outwards, and moving, having just crossed the set in some form. Therefore both bars are utilized to travel out and down the side of the set into 2nd place. I.e.:

Bars 1 and 2: Cross the Set into partner’s place and **stay facing out**

Bar 3: 1st couple dance down behind 2nd couple.

Bar 4: 1st couple dance into second place on partner’s side.

See Figure 3. 2nd couple usually step up on bars 3 and 4.

Example of dances containing this figure is Pelorus Jack (book 41) and Scott Meikle (Book 44)

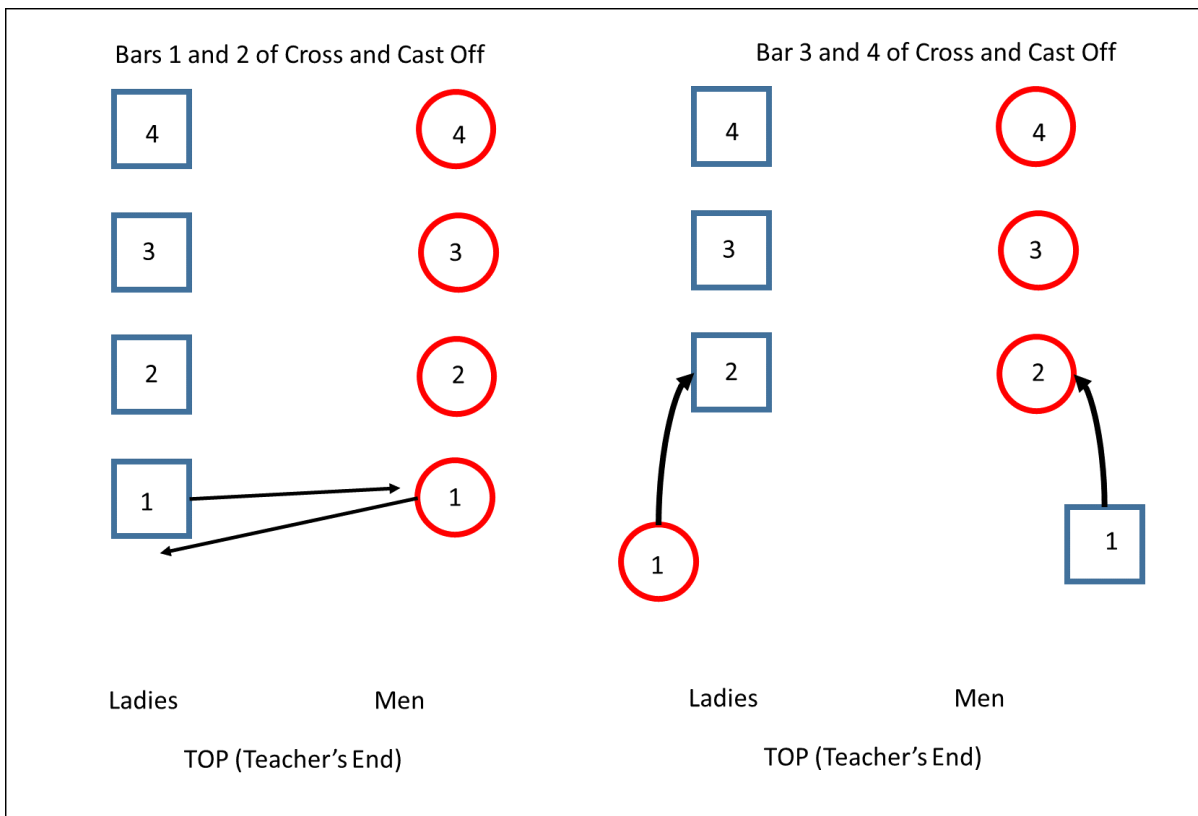


Figure 3: Cross and Cast off 1 place (or Cross giving Right Hand and Cast off 1 place)

Basic “Cast Up in 2 bars”

If “Cast Off” results in the individual progressing one or more places **down** the set (away from the top/music), then “Cast Up” results in the dancer progressing one or more places **up** the set (towards the top/music). The Phrasing is the same:

For first couple, in their starting position in the set to cast up into first place:

Steps: 2 travelling steps, one on the right foot and one on the left foot (2 bars)

Bar 1: 1st couple face the bottom of the set and dance outward, the woman to the right and the man to the left

Bar 2: 1st couple dance up behind 2nd couple into first place

Note that the 2nd Couple will normally step down out of the way on the **inside** of the set, to change places with the first couple. See Figure 4.

Note that whilst I illustrate this figure from second place, it can equally be done from 3rd or 4th places in exactly the same way.

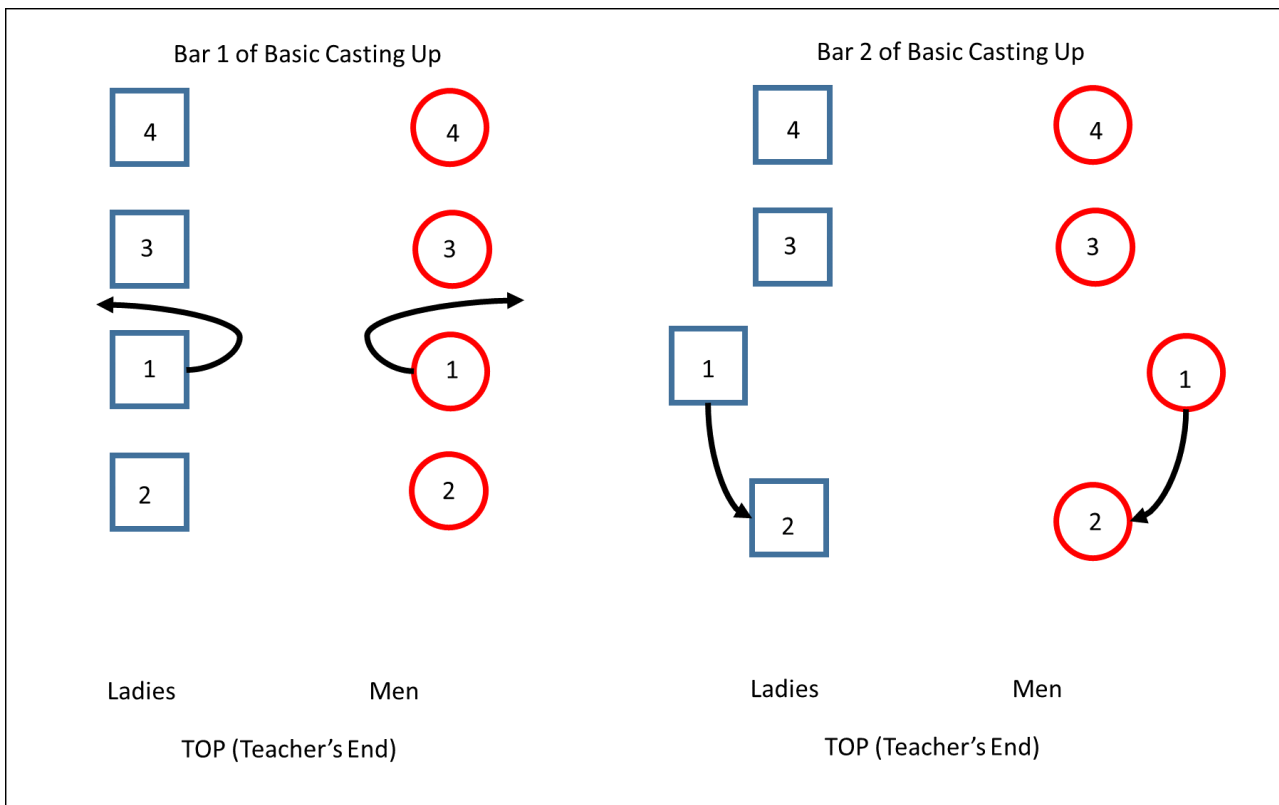


Figure 4: Basic Casting Up

Cast Down Own Sides And Cast Back To Places

This figure is found in the dance “Galloway House” (Graded book 5) and similar beginner/ceilidh type dances and invokes both casting off and casting up. This is an 8-bar phrase.

Bars 1-2: Basic Cast Off figure

Bars 3-4: Continue dancing down the outside of the sidelines for 2 places

Bars 5-6: Basic Cast Up figure

Bars 7-8: Continue dancing up the outside of the sidelines back to starting position.

Other Casting Up Figures

Pretty much every “casting off” figure has an equivalent “Casting up” figure. Once you understand the basic differences described above, the one complements the other.

“Lady Cast Up, Man Cast Down” Or Vice Versa

This utilizes the same basic “cast up” and “cast down”, or “cross and cast up/down” methodology described above. The difference here is that you are now required to dance independently from your partner.

Generally this figure starts from 2nd place and ends either:

- with the lady at the top of the set and the man in 3rd place on the sidelines (appropriate standing couples move out of the way, OR:
- with the lady between the 2s (who remain in 1st place) and the man between the 3s (who remain in 3rd place). Note this is usually given 4 bars of music to complete.

The latter is shown in Figure 5.

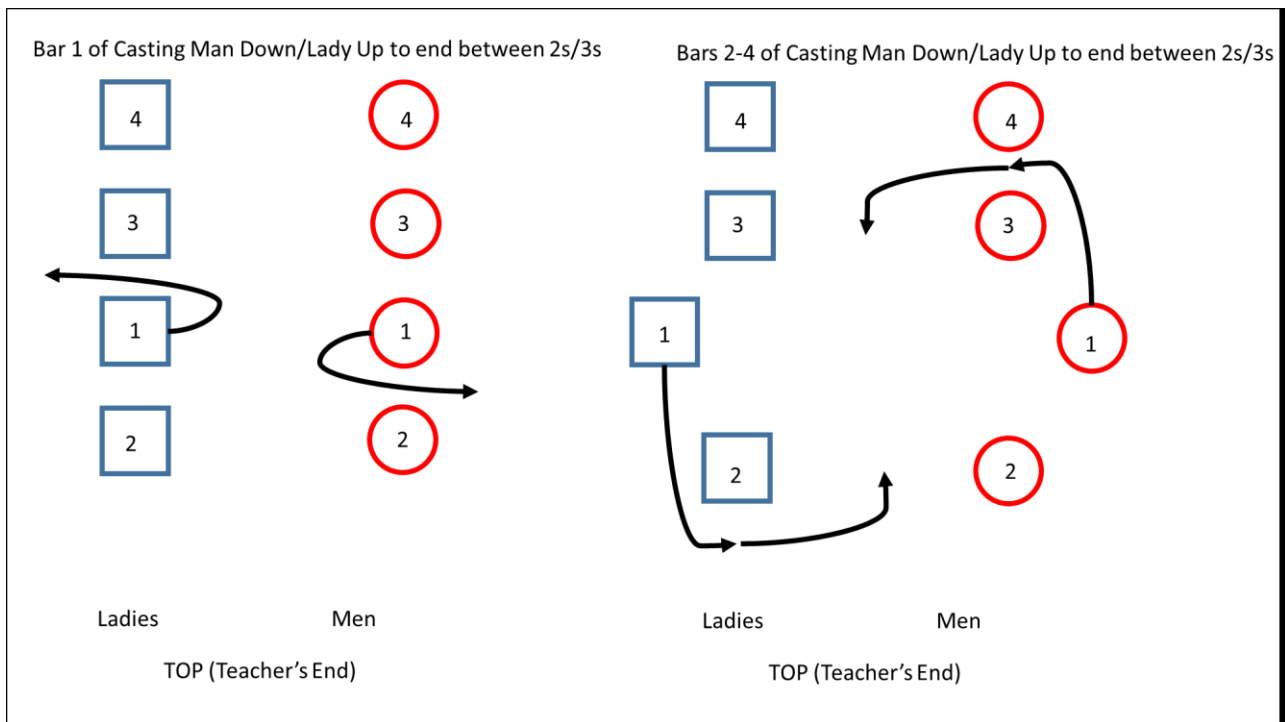


Figure 5: Lady Casts Up To End Between 2s Whilst Man Casts Down To End Between 3s

Casting Out Up Around the Threes Following Lead or Dance Down

This is very similar in habit to “Cross and Cast”, except that the preceding entry figure is lead or dance down. At the end of the lead or dance down, the dancing couple are facing down, or out of the set already and thus pick up the first bar of the “cast up” from this slightly different starting position.

Since this figure can only come mid-way through a dance, it will depend on the dance whether the “cast” is bars 3&4, or 5&6, or even 7&8 of the 8-bar phrase.

Additionally, the finishing position of the “cast up” may not be on the sidelines – the dancers may finish in the centre of the dance facing first corner. An example is the dance “Bill Clement MBE” (book 47), with the instruction:

1s set and dance down nearer hands joined between the threes and cast up to end left hand joined with partner facing first corners

Casting in Square or Triangular Sets

In either a square or triangular set, rather than being in lines down the room with your partner opposite, your partner is now next to you and you have another couple on either side to form a triangle or square.

In this case, the first bar of the “cast” begins by dancing slightly into the middle of the set, then pushing back the appropriate shoulder to dance out and round the outside of the triangle or square, one couple (two people) on – to end progressed, but still in the same “gender” you started with.

“Set and Rotate”

This is a compound (intermediate/advanced) figure performed by two couples in 8 bars which involves several two-bar sub-elements, one of which is casting around the square.

The official instructions for Set and Rotate are:

Steps: 2 setting steps and 6 travelling steps

Bars 1–2: 1st and 2nd couples, joining nearer hands on the sidelines, set to partners, release hands and begin to pull back by the right on the second step.

Bars 3–4: 1st man casts up and dances across the dance to finish in first place on the women’s side facing down, while 2nd man casts up to finish in first place on his own side facing down. At the same time 2nd woman casts off and dances across the dance to finish in second place on the men’s side facing up, while 1st woman casts off to finish in second place on her own side facing up. At the end of bar 4, 1st couple should be just inside the women’s side while 2nd couple are just inside the men’s side.

Bars 5–8: 1st and 2nd couples face partners on the sidelines and, giving right hands, change places with partners. Continue to dance clockwise to own sides, 1st and 2nd couples having changed places.

Informally, this is best remembered as:

Bars 1-2: 1st and 2nd couples, joining nearer hands on the sidelines, set to partners

Bars 3-4: 1st and 2nd couples, Cast one place clockwise (round the imaginary square made by the dancing people)

Bars 5-6: 1st and 2nd couples, Change places on the sidelines with your partner, giving right hands

Bars 7-8: 1st and 2nd couples dance on one place clockwise to own sides, having changed places.

This is illustrated in Figure 6 below.

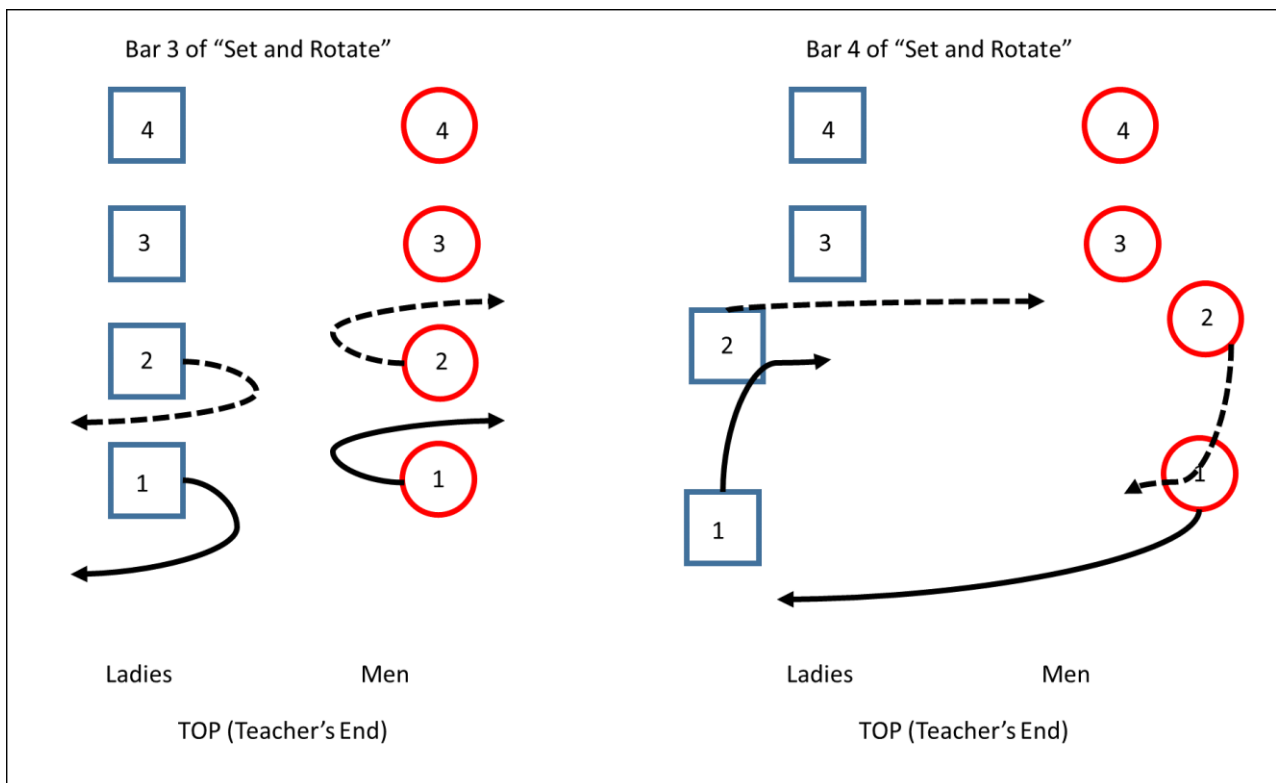


Figure 6: Casting during Bars 3&4 of “Set and Rotate”