



Slapping: Rules of Thumb

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1. Try to keep a loose wrist (although at times this will change).

2. Slap the string primarily with the inside bony area between the knuckle and the nail (part of the tip will come into play as well). I get a thick protruding callus from just below the joint to the bottom of the nail, and a smaller one at the tip just before where the nail begins to turn. These calluses are quite useful once they harden fully. The initial development of them can be very painful. You must play through the pain for a week or so. There may be some blood involved after the blisters pop! It will go numb after a while and won't hurt so bad. It's worth it. Play intensely and try not to think about it too much!

3. While slapping, either (a) gently curl the four fingers inward toward the palm in a loose fist or (b) fan them out into an almost open palm (the fingers will still tend to slightly curl inward when utilizing the open hand method but the palm will remain fairly open and unbent).

4. When plucking or "popping" I use the first finger exclusively, however, I have seen the 2nd finger employed by some players. For this column, I will discuss the use of the first finger only.

5. While reading this, arrange your arm and hand in the position of a hitchhiker thumbing a ride, elbow bent, thumb pointing away from the body, fingers curled inward. Let's first think in terms of the "loose fist" method mentioned earlier.

6. Analyze the following motions and develop them over time in order to master this slapping and popping technique (you don't always need the bass for this): Visualize your wrist moving in a similar motion to that of you loosely turning a doorknob in the direction of your body and then away. Now, combine this motion with a separate motion, in which the elbow and arm are gently employed. For this motion, imagine that you are knocking or tapping on your stomach with the nails of your curled fingers while bending and pivoting at the

elbow. You will be "turning the door knob" with your wrist, tapping on your stomach with your thumb and the backs of your knuckles, and pivoting from the elbow for this motion, the down stroke motion of the thumb. For the upstroke, or recoil, imagine pulling an imaginary string from your belly button with your bent fingers, while turning the doorknob away from you with



the wrist, and gently employing the elbow. On the downstroke, utilize the weight of your extended thumb with a whip-like motion. There are varying motions employed at various times; sometimes the knuckles will touch the stomach and sometimes they will not and the thumb swing will be more of the focus during the strike, employing a broader range of the wrist rotation motion for power and speed. Experiment with and analyze these movements. Develop them over time.

7. The pluck: Fully extend the 1st finger and thumb as though you were "shooting someone" with your first finger. Now curl your 1st finger toward you about halfway, into a hook while the remaining three fingers remain curled inward and the thumb stays fully extended. The knuckles and nails of

the curled fingers will often hit the body of the bass (or your stomach) when slapping. Don't keep them balled up or closed too tightly. The little finger should touch the inner palm while the 3rd and 4th do not, as they gradually loosen towards the 1st, which protrudes into the hook. The thumb hitches a ride. The 3rd finger is resting against the little finger, the 2nd resting against the 3rd and slightly more open, and the hook not touching 2nd.

8. When playing the 4-string bass, start by using the thumb for the 2 lower strings and the 1st finger for the 2 higher strings as a rule. You will eventually use the thumb on the G and D strings as well, but for now, slap the E and A strings with the thumb and pluck the G and D strings with the 1st finger.

9. To develop the open hand technique, pick up the bass and play some scales or musical passages across all four strings, using only the thumb. There will be no need for the hook. Practice playing for speed, which will help develop the minimal attack and recoil motion that is required for mastering this style. Various degrees of inward curl of the fingers can be integrated for opposing weight and flexibility and playing against the motion of the thumb. Varying degrees of looseness in the wrist should be employed based on the passage at hand and the desired tone. The elbow and arm move in a similar motion to that of sawing wood while rotating the wrist. The shoulder is being brought into play while the wrist rapidly pivots and the arm moves up and down and back and forth as the thumb, being slightly stiffened due to the open palm, strikes and recoils. Analyze this and develop it!

10. Play everything that you play with your fingers or a pick with your thumb to develop its use!



David Santos has slapped around his share of basslines while performing with the likes of Larry Carlton, Donna Summer, The Neville Brothers, Billy Preston, and many others.