Novice judge's cheat sheet · West Coast Swing J&J

Prelims → timing & technique
Finals → also variety & structure

Mindset: everything from newcomer is assumed (critical timing, strike on 1, posture, eyes up, slot). Novice is about **how** the basics are danced: **transitional timing** and **quality of movement**. Complicated patterns are not required — variations of basics danced well are.

BOTH ROLES

TIMING

- **Delayed weight transfer** on whole beats — a clear difference between the strike and the weight transfer.
- **Partial-full-delayed triples** — visible in the natural movement of the hips.
- **Side changes** only on delayed steps (1, 2, 4, 6 in a 6-count pattern).
- **Rolling through the feet** — receiving foot lands on toes/heel and uses the floor to control the transfer.
- **Swung rhythm** in syncopated (blues) songs.

✗ Stepping onto the flat foot · weight arriving with the strike · rushing

TECHNIQUE

- **Pitch/poise** in basics — not only V (stretch) / A (compression), but also **lotus / bracket** (center back); **uses the floor** to push away.
- **Frame** — body lead; angles create connection: **post on 4**, stretch on 6-and-1.
- **Anchor / breath** — stretch completed in the anchor; on 1 the body moves back, the strike goes forward.
- **Rotations** — underrotated on 4, partial opening in the anchor, on the balls of the feet (not heels).
- **Travelling turns** — weight stays back, spotting, direction kept.
- **Steps** — completed (especially 6), onto an extended leg; **turnout**, stable over the feet.
- **Short frame** to show stretch; **resisted release** in stretch.

✗ Bent, unfinished steps · flat heels in turns · giving away the frame

TEAMWORK / CONNECTION

- **Visual connection** — eyes on the partner or the room, never the floor.
- **Tactile connection** — follower travels to the end and waits for the redirection.
- **Listening** — follower suggests variations, leader listens. How do they resolve misunderstandings?

MUSICALITY & PRESENTATION

- **Phrase change** caught — and with the right energy.
- **Structure** — the dance follows the music (calm start, build-up, peak).
- **Pulse** on the upbeat through isolation; **double bounce** for doubled rhythm.
- **Rhythmic variations** — delayed 1, kick-ball change, double resistance.
- **Presentation** — smiling, open to the audience.

CONTENT

- Clean basics + **variations of basics** and **anchor variations**; one harder pattern per phrase is plenty.
- **Variety** of patterns and footwork (especially in finals).
- **Blues basics** — swivels, cross-slot, stutter step, kick-ball change, delay-ball change.

TIE-BREAKERS (MOSTLY FINALS)

When several couples have the above, look at **intermediate-level** elements: musical timing (stepping to other layers of the music), finer micromusicality, spins, extended dips, follower talking back to the leader.

EXTRA BY ROLE

Leader

- **Body lead** — direction by stepping back, kept through rotations; no arm pulls.
- **Structures the dance** — basics at the start of the phrase, a harder pattern in the middle, a set-up for the phrase change.
- **Phrase-change patterns** — slingshot, hip catch, duck, basic dip.
- **A few more patterns** — roll-in roll-out, telemark, whip variations.
- **Partial-full-delayed triples** used deliberately.
- **Listens** and makes room for the follower's styling.

✗ Pattern loop with no structure · missed phrase change · leading styling instead of dancing it

Follower

- **Doesn't anticipate** — handles extensions anywhere in the pattern.
- **Frame** — held with the back, shoulders down, "oranges under the elbows"; doesn't give the frame away.
- **Anchor** — elastic stretch, kept through rotation.
- **Sugar push** — precise transfers on 2 and 4 with the weight change.
- **Sugar tuck** — slow alignment in the anchor from the underrotation.
- **Spotting** in turns.
- **Novice patterns** — roll-in roll-out, whips, basic dip.
- **Footwork** — single, double, triple, kick-ball change interchangeable; anchor variations (rondes, slides, knee/foot styling).
- **Hits phrase changes** with the leader; adds small accents.

✗ Anticipating · arm (biceps) connection · styling that breaks the timing

Legend: ■ timing ■ technique ■ teamwork ■ musicality ■ content.
✗ = typical novice faults.