
The Russian Kettlebell Challenge

**Xtreme Fitness for
Hard Living Comrades**

BY PAVEL TSATSOUNINE, MASTER OF SPORTS



SECTION

1

**THE HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN
KETTLEBELL—HOW AND WHY A
LOW-TECH BALL OF IRON
BECAME THE NATIONAL CHOICE
FOR SUPER-TECH RESULTS**



VODKA, PICKLE JUICE, KETTLEBELL LIFTING, AND OTHER RUSSIAN PASTIMES

Vodka at night. Pickle juice in the morning (the best thing for a hangover). Throwing some kettlebells around between this hangover and the next one. A Russian's day well spent.

The 'kettlebell' or *girya* is a cast iron weight which looks like a basketball with a suitcase handle. It is an old Russian toy. As the 1986 Soviet *Weightlifting Yearbook* put it, "It is hard to find a sport that has deeper roots in the history of our people than the *girevoy sport*."

My ancestors played with kettlebells—when they weren't skirmishing with the Germans, Turks, and many other neighbors who wanted a piece of Mother Russia. Later, it was the key to forging the mighty power of dinosaurs like Ivan 'the Champion of Champions' Poddubny.

Poddubny, one of the strongest men of his time, trained with kettlebells in preparation for his undefeated wrestling career and six world champion belts. Thanks to K-bells, Poddubny would toy with much larger opponents, lift them over his head, and slam them into the ground! On one amusing occasion, in 1907, at London's Pavilion Theater, Poddubny destroyed the referees' table when he tossed another famous wrestler on top of it. Always the joker, Poddubny made himself a 16kg cane—so he could amuse himself watching pencilnecks at coat checks drop it on their toes.

Pyotr Kryloff, another top gun during the early days of the iron game, was nicknamed 'the King of Kettlebells', in honor of his favorite strengthening tool. He was known for his stunt of jerking two beefy soldiers over his head, while they sat inside two hollow spheres on the ends of a specially made barbell.



Russian professional strongman, Moor Znamensky, would do a handstand on two 32kg kettlebells, after which he would jump back on his feet, lifting the bells over his head at the same time. Then he would drop back in a handstand, and repeat the drill ten times! So popular were kettlebells in Tsarist Russia that any strong man or weightlifter was referred to as a girevik, or ‘a kettlebell man’.

A century ago, European and American iron-legends like Arthur Saxon favored kettlebells as much as their Russian colleagues. Then the West got prosperous and soft and the hardcore kettlebell faded into history—along with many other of our grandfathers’ manly pursuits. That is, everywhere but in Russia, a rugged land that never knew easy living.



THE WORKING CLASS SPORT

Every person can and ought to be strong.

-Hercules magazine, Russia, 1913

Although Russians have known kettlebells for as long as they have known vodka, the first official kettlebell competition did not take place until 1948. In the 1970s the sport became really popular, especially in Russia itself, the Ukraine, and the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. *Girevoy sport* was declared ‘an ethnic sport’ by many Soviet republics in 1974.

Finally in the fall of 1985, in the heat of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, the first USSR National Girevoy Sport Championship took place. Of the many stunts practiced by the old timers, only the power C&J and the one arm power snatch, both done for reps, were chosen for official competition. There used to be a one-arm press as well, but these days it sleeps with the fish and the Olympic press.

Function and tradition explain the unusual fixed-weight/high-rep competition format. Russians have always enjoyed a good show of strength like the rail tied in a knot by Ivan Zayikin from the Volga. (Zayikin’s rail is still displayed in a Paris museum). But country fairs packed up and left. Soldiers, blacksmiths, and farmers went back to their toils and battles where they needed rugged staying power more than one-repetition strength.

Kettlebells come in ‘poods’. A *pood* is an old Russian measure of weight, which equals 16kg, or 36 pounds. There are one, one and a half, and two pood K-bells, 16, 24, and 32kg respectively. They no longer come in heavier weights because the sport has evolved into a strength endurance event. Standard weights are lifted for repetitions: 16kg for juniors, 24kg for men, and 32kg for advanced men. To earn a national ranking in *girevoy sport* I had to power snatch a 32kg kettlebell forty times with one arm, and forty with the other back to back—over 40,000 foot/pounds of work—and jerk two such bells forty five times. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, it is a puker.



FIΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ: ΧΤΡΕΜΕ ΑΛΛ ΑΡΟΝΔ ΦΙΤΝ ΕΣ!

In the twentieth century, Soviet science discovered what pagans had known for generations: repetition kettlebell lifting is one of the best tools for all around physical development. Voropayev (1983) observed two groups of college students over a period of a few years. A standard battery of the armed forces PT tests was used: pullups, a standing broad jump, a 100m sprint, and a 1k run. The control group followed the typical university physical training program which was military oriented and emphasized the above exercises. The experimental group just lifted kettlebells. In spite of the lack of practice on the tested drills, the KB group showed better scores in every one of them!

The above benefits alone could have easily justified kettlebells' existence. But they were only the beginning. Surprised researchers at the famous Lesgaft Physical Culture Institute in Leningrad (Vinogradov & Lukyanov, 1986) found a very high correlation between the KBL total and a great range of dissimilar tests: strength, measured with the three powerlifts and grip strength; strength endurance, measured with pullups and parallel bar dips; general endurance, determined by a 1000 meter run; work capacity and balance, measured with special tests! Prof. Medvedyev especially hails girevoy sport's power to develop strength-endurance and strength-coordination.

Needless to say, Soviet scientists—and the comrades in charge of purchasing exercise equipment for the military, schools, and government agencies—were delighted. Why waste iron—“We could make more Kalashnikovs!”—when you can get awesome results with the traditional moderate poundage? They could not explain the spectacular all around fitness gains from the standpoint of specificity, but were too practical to be phased by this mystery. “Understanding is a delaying tactic...,” as one novelist put it. “Do you want to understand how to swim, or do you want to jump in and start swimming? Only people who are afraid of water want to understand. Other people jump in and get wet.”



KETTLEBELLS IN THE RED ARMY

My descendants, do follow my lead!

-A. V. Suvorov, legendary Russian military leader

The Red Army, too pragmatic to waste their troopers' time on pushups and situps, quickly caught on. Every Russian military unit, even outposts remote as the planet Mars, has a gym. For some strange reason, maybe because it makes your sweaty basement dungeon look like a yuppie health spa, it is called a 'courage corner' (I wish it was a joke). Every courage corner, including the permafrost-crusting cave in one of the units I served in, is equipped with K-bells. Ditto for the men-of-war. Kettlebell snatches are an integral part of the Russian Navy's tough pentathlon.

The nationally ranked weightlifter, Igor Sukhotsky, is a crazy who took up full contact karate at the age of forty-five and proceeded to dramatically kick butt. As a prominent sports scientist, Sukhotsky also did extensive research on physical conditioning for military personnel. His master's thesis was on optimal strength training for young men getting ready for service. He concluded that a soldier "must have an iron back and legs that never quit—so he can carry his gear and, if necessary, a wounded comrade, up the side of a mountain. I emphasize—not the biceps which look so good on the beach, but the back and legs." The official lifts of *girevoy sport* perfectly fit this bill.

The Weightlifting Yearbook states, "The *Girevoy sport* turns boys into men, physically strong and full of stamina. Strength and endurance are the basis of kettlebell lifting. A blend of these attributes gives birth to a new one—strength-endurance. *Gireviks* [kettlebell lifters] are known for their ability to change "I can't" into "I'll take it to the limit". All these qualities are necessary in different life situations, but especially in military service."

And after military service. I cannot help smiling at the recollection of a Russian movie about a retired army colonel. The old soldier is pressing his *dvukhpudovik* on the balcony, a typical exercise spot for many space-cramped Russians. A car pulls over next to the colonel's parked beater. The driver stays in the car; the passenger climbs out and proceeds to remove the colonel's vehicle's wheels. The old warrior yells from above ordering him to knock it off. The thief makes a smart alec comment that the colonel would be better off walking than driving at his age, and carries on. The colonel throws the 32kg kettlebell at the bad guys' car. It goes straight through the hood, blows out the



glass, and knocks out the driver. One criminal runs off, the other is out for the count, their vehicle is trashed, colonel's has been defended.

Girevoy sport delivers unparalleled cardio benefits. That is one reason kettlebells are very popular with the Russian Navy; there is nowhere to run aboard a man-of-war but who needs to if there is a kettlebell around? The load is so evenly distributed between all your muscles that not one of them gives out first—although you pray that some would and put you out of your misery.

Spetznaz, Soviet Special Operations, personnel owe much of their wiry strength, explosive agility, and never-quitting stamina to kettlebells. High rep C&Js and snatches with K-bells kick the fighting man's system into warp drive in the best traditions of twenty rep squats –minus the chafing thighs which would be a nuisance to a combat diver or a paratrooper.

Soldier, Be Strong!, the official Soviet armed forces manual on strength training approved by the Ministry of Defense (Burkov & Nikityuk, 1985), states that bodybuilders' workloads are "significantly inferior" to that of *gireviks*'. The manual declares kettlebell exercises to be "one of the most effective means of strength development", representing "a new era in the development of human strength-potential". Enough said.



SECTION

2

**SPECIAL APPLICATIONS—
HOW THE RUSSIAN
KETTLEBELL CAN DRAMATICALLY
ENHANCE YOUR CHOSEN ENDEAVOR**



KETTLEBELLS FOR COMBAT SPOTS

**They graze in peace on grass.
You hunt on cement.**

-Irwin Shaw, Bread upon the Waters

You do not need to be a sports aficionado to know how awesome Russian wrestlers are. Who has not heard of Alexander Karelin? And what other country but Russia has a judo black belt for president?

Since before the days of undefeatable Ivan Poddubny, Russian wrestlers have done a lion's share of their conditioning with kettlebells—do not believe for a minute that bodyweight exercises are all the wrestlers of the former Soviet republics do for strength!

Ballistic kettlebell drills have some highly specific applications for wrestling. The snapping-action of the hips and back, plus the radical strengthening of hands and all pulling muscles, made kettlebells the Eastern bloc wrestlers' natural first choice.

Extreme cardio action is another reason. Go out and compare one arm snatches with the Hindu squats favored by Western and Oriental wrestlers for 'leg and lung work'. High rep bodyweight squats are often used to prescreen the candidates for the no-holds-barred fighting circuit. UFC champion Ken Shamrock had to knock off 500 to get in on the action. It may sound easy but you had better believe, it is a feat. Nevertheless, as one martial artist commented on the dragondoor.com discussion site, "[One arm snatches] are evil. I can do 500 straight Hindus, but 25 reps with each arm of the DB snatch using a 45 pound dumbbell leave me completely whipped."

Skeptical? Then why not go out and try it yourself? Take a moderate sized dumbbell (a kettlebell will add another evil dimension, so a dumbbell will do for starters) and snatch it for as many reps as you can, passing it from hand to hand after every ten.

When you are done throwing up, drop me a line on the discussion site. My U.S. Navy SEAL friend John Faas puked with German punctuality every time I put him through the snatch ordeal when we were getting him ready for the frogmen.



And I bet doughnuts against dollars that he is a better man than you are.

Another super reason to choose high-rep kettlebell ballistics for your cardio is the fact that *giryas* constrict your ribcage, as happens when grappling. You will strengthen your respiratory muscles against resistance and get more wind on the mat.

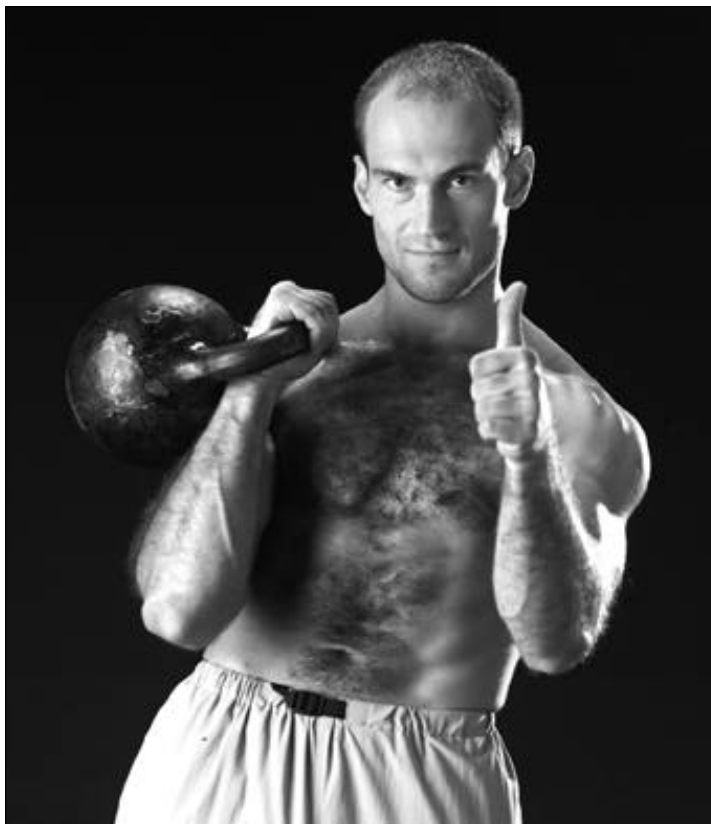
Consider including Prof. Anatoly Laputin's special breathing shrug into your regimen. Stand with two kettlebells hanging in your hands. Inhale and shrug your shoulders up. Lower the bells as you exhale through pursed lips or slightly groan through your mouth. The key to this special shrug is not to elevate the weights with your traps alone, but with maximal ribcage expansion. Do the

drill at a slow pace, otherwise you are apt to hyperventilate. You will develop great grip endurance in the process. Very high reps are in order.

Bruce Lee once said, "There are no wrists in boxing. (Experiment with this statement.) The forearm and the fist should be used as one solid piece, like a club with a knot on the end of it. The fist should be kept on a straight line with the forearm and there should be no bending of the wrist in any direction." Ditto with kettlebell lifts. A striker will develop unyielding wrists, in the process of fighting the kettleweight's determination to wrench them

And if you add military presses with a light kettlebell hanging on the inside of your forearm, off your thumb, you will strengthen your thumbs for that unfortunate occasion when the punch goes wrong, your thumb gets jammed, and you cannot make a fist for months without wincing.

Any boxer or kickboxer who takes up kettlebell lifting will also quickly appreciate his newfound ability to keep on throwing a snappy punch for many rounds.



Prizefighters are traditionally fond of pushups; they believe this exercise improves their punching power. Indeed it does, although not in the manner they believe it does.

Relaxed shoulders are critical to fluid transmission of power from the hip into the fist. Anyone who has put on a pair of gloves and climbed into the ring knows that holding your guard up for a few rounds exhausts the shoulders. A fatigued muscle is a tight muscle. Punches deteriorate into pushes when the shoulders get tired; a friend who caught me watching the tenth round of a kickboxing bout on TV could not believe that the men wildly swinging their stiff arms were professionals.

High rep overhead kettlebell lifts develop unusual shoulder endurance and are not likely to give you the overuse injuries so common among pushup fanatics. Brutal encounters with kettlebells also teach an efficient transfer of force from the feet to the hands.

Where strikers' shoulders need great endurance, grapplers' shoulders need strength and flexibility. KB drills like the windmill, the bent press, the Turkish get-up, and the like, strengthen the shoulder through an awesome range of motion and make it much less prone to injuries on the mat.

The official kettlebell lifts develop the ability to absorb ballistic shocks, which is a necessity for soldiers, fighters, and the comrades who deny America's greenhouse reality and choose to play it rough. The repetitive ballistic shock of KBL builds some serious tendons and ligaments in your wrists, elbows, shoulders, and back—with power to match!

A couple of years ago I learned of an unusual training technique by champion arm-wrestler Johnny Walker. He would press a ninety-pound dumbbell overhead with such an explosion, that it would fly a foot or two up in the air. Then Walker would catch it with one arm 'to train for the shock of the start'. If you want to develop your ability to take impact and your dental plan is not as good as Johnny's, try the official K-bell lifts.

Unless you have an Eastern European trained coach on your payroll you should choose kettlebell drills over plyometrics as a tool of developing power. Sounds like a heresy from one born and bred in the Motherland of plyometrics? Stay with me.

The application of plyometrics is widely misunderstood on this side of what used to be the Iron Curtain. And the typical Western definition of plyos, as any rebound drills, would appall the shock method's creator Prof. Yuri Verkhoshansky. I do not care to dwell on the details, just remember that the Party



is always right. Or refer to Drs. Mel Siff and Yuri Verkhoshansky's pointed criticism of the Western textbooks on plyometrics in *Supertraining*. It is better to leave a power tool alone if you have no clue how to use it.

Kettlebell snatches and C&Js offer a "people's alternative" to plyos. And to the barbell Olympic lifts. Weightlifting is a wonderful sport, but let's get real—it's an elitist sport like polo or sailing. WL requires state of the art equipment—a quality OL barbell set can set you back more than a motorcycle—and constant expert coaching. A lifter like Clarence Bass—who can achieve success on the platform, without the above—is a rarity. *Girevoy sport*, on the other hand, is a working class sport. Kettlebells are cheap, no platform is required, and almost anyone can master the skills in a short period of time from a book or a video.

If you have access to a deserted patch of soft ground your kettlebell will help you perfect your *kime* or focus. Throw your giryas in every imaginable fashion: up, down, and sideways, with one arm and two, etc. By the way, Russians have kettlebell throwing competitions. My old man Vladimir Tsatsouline, a retired army officer, took the first place in his age group in the prestigious White Russian Winter Nationals a couple of years ago (and even got paid five bucks for it, old pro).

Make a point of exhaling forcefully to 'match the breath with the force' when you throw. And keep in mind that if you throw the KB into anything harder than sand you could break the handle; cast iron is hard but brittle. A great boxer, famous boxing and kickboxing coach, and family friend Andrey Dolgov has his 'bone breakers'—the nickname his prizefighters received in the international arena for their notorious punches—throw light rocks instead. It is important to throw varying weights, from heavy to very light, for optimal nervous system adaptation to speed. Shadowboxing and relaxation exercises in between will not hurt either.

The next great outdoor drill would not work with a rock. Steve Maxwell, the wrestling champion whose routines you can read about in the next chapter, ties a towel to his kettlebell and starts swinging it like a T&F hammer. A terrific workout for every muscle of the waist, states Steve. Needless to say, you can think of many variations of the hammer drill: slam the KB into the ground after a couple of spins, lower or raise the bell as it goes around you, do the drill with one or two hands, pass the towel from hand to hand, draw number eight...

Steve Justa, an inventive strength trainer from the heartland—and the author of *Rock, Iron, Steel*—likes to toss a kettlebell in front of his hips, from left to right and back. He states that this drill "builds tremendous wrenching power in arms, shoulders, and side muscles from head to toe."

An athlete from a rough sport cannot find a better power tool than the kettlebell,



WHY RUSSIAN LIFTERS TRAIN WITH KETTLEBELLS



In the old days, any Russian strongman or lifter was called a *girevik*, or ‘a kettlebell man’. Many famous Soviet weightlifters, such as Vorobyev, Vlasov, Alexeyev, and Stogov, started their Olympic careers with old-fashioned kettlebells. Recalls two times Olympic champion and world record holder Leonid Zhabotinskiy: “We kids got into the habit of visiting the local blacksmith. Among the metal scrap in his shop we found a one-pood [16kg] kettlebell. So we tried real hard lifting it with one arm, then with the other, so we would hurt all over the day after! ...It was my first competition in lifting weights.” No wonder one prestigious kettlebell tournament was named after Leonid Zhabotinskiy.

Yuri Vlasov who defeated mighty Paul ‘the Wonder of Nature’ Anderson, once interrupted an interview he was giving to a Western journalist and proceeded to press a pair of ‘doubles’, ten times. “A wonderful exercise,” commented world champion weightlifter. “...It is hard to find an exercise better suited for developing strength and flexibility simultaneously.”

Indeed, the number one reason Olympic weightlifters should add kettlebells to their regimen, is the promise of spectacular gains in shoulder and hip flexibility. The drill of choice is the kettlebell overhead squat. The overhead squat is a staple exercise for a weightlifter, but not an easy one to master. It takes unusual shoulder and upper back range of motion to perform a rock bottom squat, while holding a barbell or a pair of dumbbells overhead—even with a very light poundage. Athletes usually fail to bring the weight far enough behind their head—and either lose it in front or fall on their butt.

By the nature of their shape, kettlebells hang behind the hands and make the balancing act much easier. Now, for the first time, you can do a legit overhead squat. The KBs will stretch out your shoulders in no time flat—just keep on overhead KB squatting!



Although KBs are worth getting for shoulder flexibility alone, there are plenty of drills—other than overhead squats—that you can do with them, to supplement your Olympic weightlifting training. Randall Strossen, Ph.D. is one of the top weightlifting experts in the US and the publisher of the classy magazine, *MILO: A Journal for Serious Strength Athletes* (subscribe on www.ironmind.com). Strossen comments: “It’s no secret that kettlebells were standard equipment for Eastern Bloc strength athletes and old time strongmen—they are excellent for swings, laterals, rowing and a variety of throwing-related movements.”

And much more. Prof. Arkady Vorobyev recommends kettlebell snatches to weightlifters as a means of developing quickness. Three to four times a week—and never to the point where you start slowing down. The former Olympic champion also favors snatching two 32kg kettlebells for sets of five, while standing on an elevation, as a special snatch exercise.

The authoritative weightlifting textbook by ex-world champion, Prof. Alexey Medvedev, lists twenty-four kettlebell exercises for the arms and shoulder girdle—and twenty-nine for the legs and torso! Another Russian weightlifting expert, V. I. Rodionov, recommends a great variety of kettlebell drills, including stiff-legged snatches with one or two KBs, one arm swings to chest level, hands switching every rep, split and squat snatches, and juggling one or two kettlebells, by yourself or with a partner. He prescribes kettlebell throws—overhead, forward, and to the side, as well as the techniques employed by discus and hammer throwers—for developing quickness. He recommends occasionally using high repetition kettlebell lifts, to develop special endurance.

Rodionov’s kettlebell leg-work menu is very extensive: front and overhead squats, feet flat and on the balls of the feet, Hack lifts on the balls of the feet with a kettlebell held behind the lifter’s hips, leg extensions with a kettlebell hanging off the lifter’s instep, and lunges. The scientist insists on turning your front foot slightly in and keeping it flat when performing KB lunges. The rear heel is off the floor and is turned slightly out. The emphasis is on depth and stretching. Russian lifters also favor explosively switching the legs in the low position—which is sometimes referred to as ‘the Russian lunge’ on this side of the late Berlin Wall

The one-legged kettlebell front squat, or ‘pistol’, tops off Rodionov’s leg list. I have successfully implemented this awesome drill into my S.W.A.T. team and U.S. federal agency trainings. You can watch the proper pistol technique in my *Rapid Response* videos. You may use one or two kettlebells.

High step-ups are popular among Russian weightlifters for glute development and flexibility. Kettlebells offer a fine tool for overloading. Clean a pair to your chest and go for it. Keep your shin vertical and push through your heel. Use a hard, elevated surface, not a soft bench.



A cruel and unusual drill is 'the Sots press', named after the world champion weightlifter of the early eighties, Russian Victor Sots. It rewards you with exceptional shoulder strength and active flexibility. Clean a pair of giryas and go into a full squat. Now military press the bells! Good luck, you'll need it.

The original Sots press is performed with a barbell and will defy most humans, even with an empty bar. Because you don't have to worry about getting round your head—and thanks to their displaced centers of gravity— kettlebells enable you to work up to the barbell version.

When working up to a kettlebell Sots press, master this squat press from the shoulders first—and only then try to press from the rack on your chest. Keep your elbows as high as possible, or you are doomed.

Kettlebells are not new to all American weightlifters. "I used to use kettlebells years ago; at the University of Notre Dame in the sixties," Ken Durso wrote me from Tennessee. "There were all manner of training aids in Father Lange's gym including some old kettlebells. Although I never used them much, after graduation I lifted for the McBurney YMCA team in New York City, sort of a third stringer behind some really good Olympic lifters—Dick Rosen (148lbs, pressed 305); David Berger (165lb expatriate to Israel, was killed at the Olympics by the Arab terrorists); I was fourth in the Junior Nationals in 1969, best lifts of 280 press, 260 snatch, 340 C and J. There were kettlebells in that old gym on 23rd Street and I used to do one arm presses and various swings.

After many years, I bought one of IronMind's kettlebell handles late last year and began training again with them in my routine, nothing very regular at first. Just wanted to feel it again. Started doing light power cleans, up to the shoulder and then an overhead press, sets of six or eight, down and up, down and up. Got to over 100lbs with either arm and have the video tape to prove it... Unfortunately the heavier weight began to pulverize my upper arms as the plates swung round, crashing into my outer biceps. I got very black and blue. I switched to very high pulls, not actually racking the weight... I had adjusted my footing to straddle on some stacks of roof shingles. This provided clearance for the bell to swing down between the legs and lengthen the pull. Very important, this approximates the pull in the weight over bar event of the Highland Games, very similar."

Kent Durso finished third at Pleasanton US Championships Highland Games last year, Masters class. "Also, I am fiddling with a kind of shot put motion, for reps with a lighter weight, to get extension of the shoulder, very important for that last push on the stone. As you can see, I am still experimenting with the kettlebells. I believe they are directly beneficial for throwing events."



Although powerlifters have no need for above average shoulder flexibility—a Pler who can scratch the back of his head is off the charts—they will find overhead kettlebell squats unmatchable in promoting hip and lower back flexibility. For max power and safety, a powerlifter needs to keep a tight arch in the lower back all the way into the hole—a rounded back subtracts 15% from your pull according to Roman (1962) and does no good to your squat either. The overhead kettlebell squat done for a few sets of five, in lieu of your usual squat and deadlift warmup, is your ticket to achieving the perfect SQ and DL technique—and squat depth.

Alexey Vorotintsev, a prominent coach and a holder of many USSR kettlebell records, has been influential in getting PLers to train with kettlebells. And why not? Recall that there is a high correlation between the KBL total and the PL total (Vinogradov & Lukyanov, 1986).

Many Russian powerlifters start or wrap up their deadlift session with kettlebell pulls or swings. 32kgx12/3 is the typical format unless the intention is to build up the back and hammies with back-off sets. Another choice you have, when incorporating kettlebells into your power regimen, is *complex training*.

Dr. Fred Hatfield is one of the most competent sports scientists in the US. He was also the first man to officially squat over 1,000 pounds. Hatfield, AKA “Dr. Squat”, recommends doing one or two explosive vertical jumps right before a deadlift attempt. He warns that the effect is lost if the lifter spends too much time adjusting his grip.

Dr. ‘Squat’s idea is to facilitate a more intense contraction of the musculature involved. Since the hips and back, rather than the thighs, do the most work in the deadlift, I believe that KB snatches or pulls are superior to jump squats, in the DL context. Make sure to focus on explosion and immediate reversal of the movement when the KB hits the low point below your knees. Imagine you have touched a hot stove.

B.P. Workman
pulling 655.



You can also plug kettlebells into Steve Wilson’s deadlift routine.

Recently Texas powerlifter, Ben Phillip Workman contacted me. He told me about a radical DL routine by Steve Wilson who pulled 850 back in the eighties. Wilson deadlifted 225-275 pounds, or 26-32% of his max, for two to three sets of twenty reps two to three times a week. Once a month he would deadlift heavy. This ‘non-scientific’ and counterintuitive



routine worked not only for superhuman Wilson. “Pavel, the Steve Wilson DL [program] worked out surprisingly well!” wrote B. Phillip Workman. “I made my own modifications along the way but I was able to pull 675 with nothing but a belt (no roids either). I was quite surprised that lifting submaximal weights often really juiced my dead. My best DL before that was normally 605 on a great day...it also had a positive effect on my squat, I feel. I squatted 625 with just a belt (of course I was squatting on a regular basis once a week). You know, when I think about it, the deadlift jumped when I went from pulling 1-2 times a month to pulling 2-3 times a week with probably between 80-100+ reps a week! Makes me put that much more faith in PTP [my book *Power to the People!: Russian Strength Training Secrets for Every American*]!”

I believe that *central pattern generators*, the neural circuits in charge of rhythmical movements are to thank for Messrs. Wilson and Workman’s success. One of the CPGs’ jobs is to disinhibit the antagonistic muscles, that is ‘remove the brakes’ your body always puts on. In essence the CPGs ‘lubricate’ your movement—make it more efficient. Now when you try harder—for example at your monthly heavy deadlift session—you will go further. That is the theory.

But whatever the theory is, obviously the program delivered. I suspect that the Wilson routine will work even better if you do one arm kettlebell snatches or snatch pulls instead of deadlifts. The KB drills are at least as good in building up the spinal erectors and hamstrings as repetition deadlifts. Then they are safer (I am not a big fan of more than five reps in the dead; I gave my reasons in *Power to the People!*). Plus they enforce a clean, efficient groove that will carry over to deadlifts. Strength coach extraordinaire, Bill Starr, stated on many occasions that quick lifts teach a powerlifter a very precise pulling groove. No one in his right mind would do high-rep barbell quick lifts (too dangerous, among other reasons) but with kettlebells you have a green light.

Please give the Wilson routine a try with kettlebells: two to three times a week, two to three sets of ten reps per arm (twenty total). Pick a kettlebell that works you without killing you. Once a month try a conservative max. Let me know how you do on the dragondoor.com discussion site.

And one more good reason for a powerlifter to train with kettlebells: KBL’s repetitive ballistic shock will build some serious tendons and ligaments—with power to match! Although heavy supports in the tradition of Jowett, Anderson, and Grimek are a must for a man or woman of power, they are only half the connective tissue training equation. Eastern European specialists, such as Prof. Verkhoshansky, recommend full-amplitude, high-rep work to stimulate tendon and ligament development. So go get ‘em, tiger!



GET HUGE WITH KETTLEBELLS— IF YOU WISH

“Not a single sport develops our muscular strength and bodies as well as kettlebell athletics,” wrote Ludvig Chaplinskiy in the Russian magazine *Hercules* in 1913.

Indeed. Pyotr Kryloff’s pipes measured 49cm, or 19+ inches, at his prime, exactly one hundred years ago.

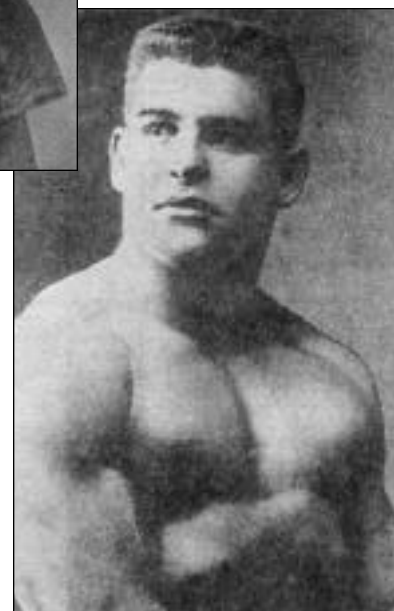
Kettlebell master, Ivan Poddubny sported a pair of 52cm, or almost 21 inch arms!

Before steroids, protein shakes, and easy living.

All old-time Russian physique men trained with kettlebells. Konstantin Stepanov from St. Petersburg, the winner of many physique shows held between 1912 and 1917, enjoyed training with a pair of ‘doubles’ and could juggle a three pood or 48kg kettlebell!



Pyotr Kryloff left and
Konstantin Stepanov
below



Bodybuilders love training variety but a kettlebell will give them much more than a welcome distraction from the grind of conventional weights and machines.

For arm and chest training, the *girya* is superior to the dumbbell or barbell.

When you curl a DB or BB the resistance quickly drops off near the top of the movement; the forearm bones are supporting the weight.



The kettlebell's center of gravity, however, is removed by a good foot from the body at the completion of the curl. That means that your biceps will have to work hard through a longer range of motion and consequently get a better growth stimulation than with a BB or DB.

Ditto for the pecs. Bodybuilders love chest training—dumbbell presses and flies are on the top of the list of their favorite exercises. Muscle magazines reasonably advise that you 'squeeze' your pecs as you complete each rep because the resistance falls off near the top.

With kettlebells, your pectorals get overloaded even at the lockout, because the KBs hang off to the sides, rather than rest atop your vertical and locked arms.



Again, greater overload through a longer range of motion equals greater muscle mass. Pyotr Kryloff's pecs never failed to inspire admiration—and not just because they were tattooed with a double headed Russian imperial eagle. 'The King of Kettlebells' boasted spectacular chest development, unparalleled in his pre-bench press era. Predictably, Kryloff's training centered on a pair of 'doubles', or 32kg *giryas*.

Giryas are every bit as superior for shoulder development. Try the Scott press that helped Mr. Olympia Larry Scott in his quest for cannonball delts. Start with your elbows tucked against your ribs and your palms facing each other. The bells are hanging outside your shoulders. Now raise the bells overhead in an arc similar to the groove of a chest fly. Keep your elbows bent throughout and keep your arms and the weights in the same plane as your shoulders throughout the set. If you have rotator cuff problems do not go all the way up or you are apt to lose control and drop the bells on your head.

If you do this drill with a pair of kettlebells, rather than dumbbells, you will deliver greater overload through a longer range of motion, due to the KBs' displaced center of gravity. Ditto for the parallel grip press that was once popular among bodybuilders. Start the press in the same fashion as the Scott press, but press the bells almost straight up rather than in a wide arc.



Zedat from Riga

Back in the days when steroids did not exist and bodybuilders were made out of tougher stuff, repetition clean and jerks were a popular bulking up drill for the whole body. In 1952 highly respected *Ironman* founder and editor, Peary Rader reported in his magazine about a muscle builder who:

“used the clean and jerk as an exercise in a weight gaining experiment. Jim has always been a “hard gainer” and found it almost impossible to make progress. He went on this program of cleans and jerks... with all the poundage he could use correctly for the required number of reps (about 15 to 20). He immediately began gaining weight very rapidly and was amazed that the practice of this one lift or exercise could have such a profound effect on his body. Subsequently others of us have made similar experiments with this lift and found that it not only was a good weight gaining medium but also developed strength, endurance, speed, and timing that nothing else could give us. We also found it to be the toughest workout we have ever had.”

You will make even better gains if you opt for K-bells instead of a barbell. Controlling two independent weights adds another cruel dimension to the C&J. And upgrading from dumbbells to kettlebells makes things even harder, because of the way in which the kettlebells are balanced.





Georg Lurich

Repetition one arm snatches are not shabby either when it comes to bulking up your back, shoulders, and even biceps. Comrade Lawrence Kochert posted this on the dragondoor.com forum: “I have been doing one arm snatches (shown in kettlebell video) with a 35lb. dumbbell. I have noticed distinctive hypertrophy of my biceps since doing them. I usually perform 7-9 sets of 15-10 reps. and rest 1-2 min. in between.”

Bodybuilders love drop sets because they are great for building mass and vascularity. If you are new to this racket, a ‘drop set’ is performing an exercise for a prescribed number of reps, usually almost to the point of failure, then reducing the load and immediately going on.

The technique works great for curls and such—you can just work your way down the dumbbell rack. But when it comes to such superior mass builders as chin-ups and parallel bar dips, the drop sets run into a snag. Both exercises require extra weight to be hung on the bodybuilder’s waist, at the end of a special belt. The belt is no parachute harness and takes awhile to undo. By the time you have finally ditched the hanging iron, you have lost the back-to-back double whammy effect.

In Russia, bodybuilders, soldiers, and athletes of every persuasion routinely use kettlebells for extra pullup and dip resistance. Just hang them on your feet and you are in business. When the going gets ugly do the ‘quick release’ by pointing your toes down and carry on. Naturally, do the drill outside or stick some mats under your pullup and dip bars.

It goes without saying that if you don’t want huge pecs and arms, do not get carried away with kettlebell curls, flies, and supine presses. Concentrate on the classic kettlebell training that de-emphasizes the above and focuses instead on ballistic drills and various standing presses. And fight the urge to eat more when your metabolism kicks up into overdrive. The result will be a physique built more along the lines of Laurent Delvaux’s statue *Hercules*: broad shoulders with just a hint of pecs, back muscles standing out in bold relief, wiry arms, rugged forearms, a cut-up midsection, and strong legs, without a hint of squat-induced chafing.



KETTLEBELLS FOR ARM - WRESTL

We introduced kettlebells to XXI century America at the last Arnold's Fitness Expo. The number one fitness industry convention in the world, Schwarzenegger's super trade show features bodybuilding, martial arts, and arm-wrestling events. The Arnold Classic invitational arm-wrestling tournament is one of the most prestigious in the world.

Top arm-wrestlers flocked to our booth to check out the kettlebells. World champion Mary McConaughy had seen them at an AW gym in St. Petersburg, Russia and now got a chance to give them a ride. She gave them two thumbs up; so did many other top arm-benders.

The kettlebell is one of the best grip and forearm developers in existence. It has been hailed by such grip greats as John Brookfield. Dr. Fred Hatfield, a powerlifting legend and strength training expert, once quipped, "The best grip exercises are always going to be pulling at heavy weights ballistically." High-rep snatches forge steel trap fingers and painfully pump the forearms to new growth. Their action is similar to the ballistic repetitive loading of rock climbing.

The forearm's largest muscles—the wrist flexors—which bend your wrist towards you, also get an awesome workout. They constantly fight the heavy kettlebell's determination to bend your wrist backward. A *girevik* is taught to counter this action by forceful flexion of the wrist.

This contraction, in addition to building up the forearm, stimulates the bicep. Try this test: make a fist and then flex your wrist as much as possible. You should feel your biceps tensing up. This is a manifestation of the neurological phenomenon of *irradiation*, which I explain in *Power to the People!: Russian Strength Training Secrets for Every American*. New forearm development also boosts the biceps measurement by literally pushing on the biceps from underneath.

“Surprisingly, I also gained almost an inch on my biceps, which now measured nearly 18 inches for the first time in my life,” reported British Dr. Alan Radley in *MILO* after an intense stretch of specialization on grip feats. “My shoulders and back also grew considerably during this period, despite the fact that I was only really concentrating on strengthening my forearms. Please note as well that this progress is in a guy with nearly twenty years of heavy weightlifting experience...”



A kettlebell is easily tied to a string, for the popular forearm exercise of rolling a rope on a stick. Russian strength training expert V. I. Rodionov recommends the following novel kettlebell drill for wrist strength. Lay your kettlebell on its side, the handle perpendicular to the floor. Rest your forearm on the floor, grab the top of the handle, and roll the kettlebell upside down so it rests on its handle. Take your hand off the handle and quickly place it on the kettlebell's bottom to prevent it from falling. For finger strength Rodionov suggests flexing your fingers with a *girya* hanging on your finger tips.

A fine wrist strengthener, specific to arm bending, is to repeatedly throw and catch a kettlebell with its handle vertical in front of you. The aforementioned grip, wrist, and biceps developing powers of kettlebells make them a logical training choice for arm-wrestlers.



GETTING YOUNGER AND HEALTHIER WITH KETTLEBELLS

Doctor Krayevskiy, the founder of the St. Petersburg Athletic Club, ‘the father of Russian athletics’, and ‘Russian Lion’ Hackenschmidt’s coach, trained religiously with kettlebells. The doctor took up training at the age of forty-one and twenty years later he was said to look fresher and healthier than at forty.

Many Russians throw their KBs around non-competitively, just for health. Vasiliy Kubanov, from a village in the Kirovograd area, underwent a very complex digestive tract surgery at twenty-nine years of age. He was in such rough shape that the Soviet government, not famous for being too nice to anyone, offered to put him on disability. Vasiliy refused, started exercising with dumbbells and finally kettlebells, and even earned his national ranking four years after his surgery! So powerful was the girevoy sport’s effect on Kubanov’s life that he ended up getting the job of a physical education instructor at his collective farm.

A popular ‘kettlebells for health’ movement was started by Evgeniy Revuka who used to be a proverbial ninety-eight pound weakling, plagued by various illnesses. Following some serious KB training Revuka said good-bye to his sickness and became one of the top *gireviks* in the Ukraine. Inspired, Revuka organized a kettlebell club at his factory, *Ukrelectorchermet*. The comrades who joined boasted a long list of maladies—but not for long; kettlebells cured them.

Many Russians successfully rehabilitated hopeless back injuries with kettlebells. Vladimir Nedashkovskiy from the city of Uzhgorod received a bad back injury back in 1969, but rehabbed himself with kettlebell lifting and even earned a national ranking! The most inspiring story is that of Valentin Dikul. A circus acrobat, Valentin took a bad fall and broke his back when he was seventeen. Dikul said no to the wheel-chair and painstakingly rehabilitated himself, largely with the help of trusted kettlebells. But he did not stop there. He proceeded to become a great circus strongman juggling 80kg balls. Recently, at the age of sixty, Valentin Dikul pulled a semi-official All Time Historic Deadlift of 460kg (I say semi-official because it was the Guinness people rather than the International Powerlifting Federation who certified it)!



If you have a back problem, make sure to check kettlebell or any other forms of exercise with your doctor before starting. No doubt, kettlebell lifting has a lot to offer to your health but it could also destroy you if you are not careful or took it up against your doctor's advice. It is an extreme sport, don't you forget it, Comrade.

Repetitive ballistic loading of KB snatches and C&Js appears to be highly beneficial to your joints—provided you do not overdo it. Drs. Verkhoshansky and Siff state in *Supertraining*, "...joints subjected to heavy impact are relatively free of osteoarthritis in old age and those subjected to much lower loading experience a greater incidence of osteoarthritis and cartilage fibrillation." After a long list of references, they continue: "Dr. Mark Swanepoel at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, pointed out that, as one progresses up the lower extremity, from the ankle, to the knee, the hip and finally to the lumbar spine, so the extent of fibrillation increases at any given age. It appears that the cartilage of joints subjected to regular impulsive loading with relatively high contact stresses is mechanically much stiffer and better adapted to withstand the exceptional loading of running and jumping than the softer cartilage associated with low loading. Thus, joint cartilage subjected to regular repetitive loading remains healthy and copes very well with impulsive loads, whereas cartilage that is heavily loaded infrequently softens... the collagen network loses its cohesion and the cartilage deteriorates (Swanepoel, 1998)."



HOW KETTLEBELLS MELT FAT AND BUILD A POWERFUL HEART - WITHOUT THE DISHONOR OF DIETING AND AEROBICS

Through mutual friend, powerlifting champion and WashingtonPost.com columnist Marty Gallagher, I had the pleasure of being introduced to Len Schwartz, M.D. The inventor of Heavyhands® is a man who—at an age when most guys consider reaching for the remote to be heavy exertion—can knock off one arm chins and other equally impressive feats. Len sports a GQ physique, to boot.

Dr. Schwartz conducted in-depth research at the Human Energy Laboratory, University of Pittsburgh, on the training effects of what he calls Panaerobic® exercise—where you combine hand weights with walking and various other forms of movement.

Dr. Schwartz reported spectacular fat loss from his type of exercise and rightfully referred to his method as “the premier method for controlling body composition”. Again, it makes sense that kettlebell lifting has the same effect. No guesses here; I have seen it time and time again in the old country. It works just as well on this side of what used to be the Iron Curtain. Comrade Jason Clower recently reported on the dragondoor.com forum that his metabolism went through the roof with near daily kettlebell training. The desperate chap could not get enough food, especially meat, and was asking what he should do ‘to feed the furnace’.

The fat loss power of kettlebells is explained by the extremely high metabolic cost of throwing a weight around combined with the fat burning effect of the growth hormone stimulated by such exercise.

The author of *Manly Weight Loss*, top strength coach Charles Poliquin, explains:

“Here's the idea: If you generate a lot of lactic acid during your weight-lifting sets, your body will then produce more growth hormone. Growth hormone helps your body release fatty acids from your fat cells, which you then use for energy. Result: You get muscle from lifting weights, and you lose fat. For most guys, the net result will be lost weight, without having to run a mile or take a single



Spinning class. To make this work, though, you have to rethink the way you lift. If your idea of a workout is going into the gym and pushing out a few bench presses, then dissecting the latest ballgame with your buddies between sets, you'll find Poliquin's workout techniques a total shock. To generate enough lactic acid to promote fat loss, you have to extend your sets to about a minute, then rest for a minute, then move on to your next set. (Nobody said it was easier than aerobics.)”

One of the effects of Dr. Schwartz's *combined exercise* was a remarkable decrease in the trainees' heart rates. Even in experienced runners whose RPMs had stabilized decades ago. As for untrained people, their resting heart rates plummeted by 25 BPMs after only five weeks of training! Dr. S' own motor beats a bare 35 beats per minute. It stands to reason that high rep kettlebell drills have a similar effect.

So, why bother?

I recall dozens of minivans with lousy four cylinders waiting for a tow in the mountains and deserts when my wife Julie and I drove from Minnesota to California. Meanwhile V-8s cruised by without overheating. By the same token, people with a high heart rate are at risk of 'overheating' while many studies and common sense suggest that a slower heart rate is a healthier heart rate.

Dr. Schwartz explains that “a slow heart rate is a more effective heart-muscle supplier and safer than a fast heart. Why? Because the heart muscle fibers receive their oxygen-rich blood *between beats*; essentially, a slower heart rate means more opportunity for the heart itself to receive life-giving oxygen. If you choose a fast, sedentary heart rate over a slower trained one, you're also opting for a dangerously fast heart if you should forget yourself long enough to chase a bus!” warns the author of *The Heavyhands Walking Book*.





SECTION

9

DOING IT— KETTLEBELL TECHNIQUES

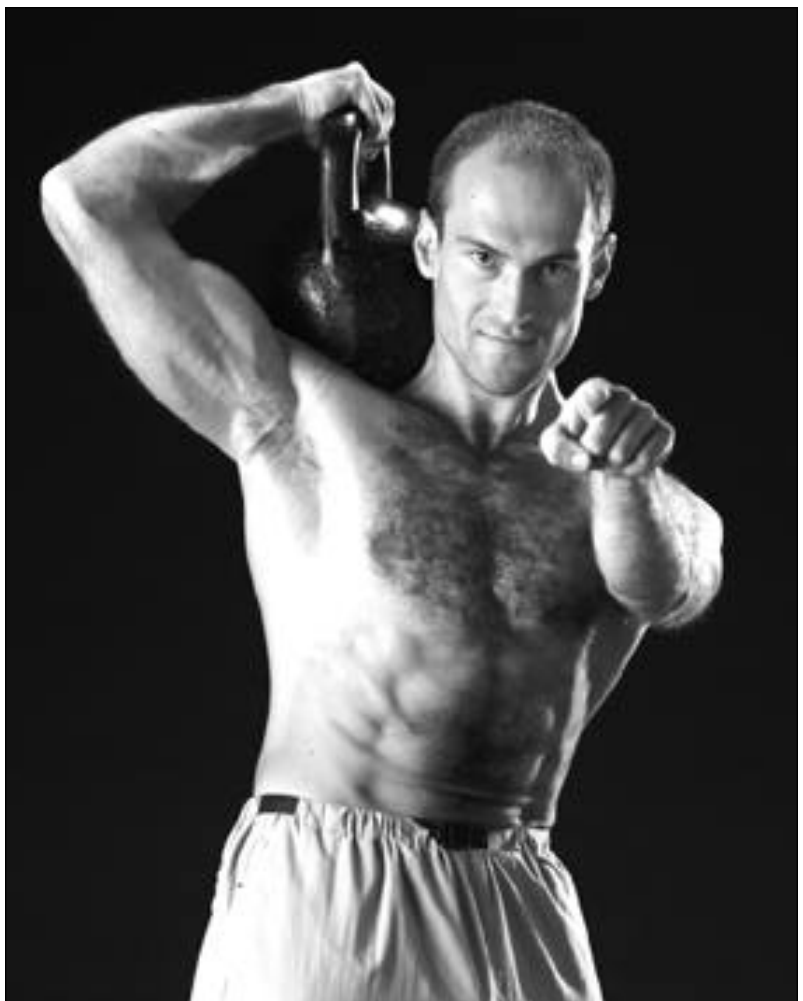
WHY KETTLEBELLS?

Before embarking on a KB program, naturally you have to get a pair of kettlebells. The detective from a popular Russian thriller decides to become a better man, buys a kettlebell, and tries to sneak it into his office so he could work out after the hours. As he is huffing and puffing up the stairs, another cop sees him and raises his eyebrows: “Evidence?” —“No, private property.”

Ironically, this property is hard to come by in the American land of milk and honey. As Dr. Randall Strossen, the editor of *MILO: A Journal for Serious Strength Athletes*, observed, it is easier to find honest arm measurements than a kettlebell. Not any more. Dragon Door is now offering kettlebells cast off the original Russian molds.

There are plenty of reasons to choose the K-bells over the mainstream equipment and methods, or at least to add them to your regimen.

K-bells are a greater challenge than dumbbells and barbells, not even to mention the wussy machines. Try to balance that mean hunk of iron—especially if you tackle the bottoms up drills!



KBs are suitable for men and women (we are planning to manufacture 8kg and 4kg kettlebells for ladies\), young and old—as long as they are tough and have no health restrictions. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Champion Steve Maxwell’s son Zack started kettlebells at age twelve. Last time I looked, my father was sixty-four—and still going strong with his KB’s.



Kettlebells are perfect for individual or group training, for example in military and law enforcement academies or athletic teams.

Giryas give the ‘working class’ answer to elitist weightlifting. You do not need expensive weights—an Ivanko barbell can cost as much as a motorcycle—platforms, and expert coaching. Just a ‘people’s’ kettlebell, this book, and a few square feet of space.

Kettleweights are also the working class alternative to plyometrics.

A KB is a great tool for improving an athlete’s ability to expertly absorb shocks. When that thing flips over you had better have your act together! Or else.

Obviously all these benefits make kettlebells the logical choice for any sports, football, basketball, even soccer. A soccer player commented on one-arm snatches on the dragondoor.com discussion site, “This has been a terrific exercise in respect to adding snap to my movements and ability to absorb contact.”

Giryas are outstanding grip developers, especially if you do plenty of repetition snatches and add the bottoms up cleans and presses to your regimen.

“Nobody does it better, it makes me feel sad for the rest.” The James Bond theme song might as well have been written about the kettlebells’ effect on promoting shoulder and hip flexibility.

They may be uncompromisingly hardcore, but kettlebells are still the best bet against traditional chrome-plated equipment, for building best-at-show muscles, like biceps and pecs.

The KB is a highly effective tool for strengthening the connective tissues, especially in the back. Many bad backs have been fixed with this deceptively crude looking tool, including the broken back of the man who would become one of the world’s strongest. Remember to get your doctor’s approval first.

Kettlebells are much less expensive than fancy-schmancy treadmills and home gyms. They are virtually indestructible and take up very little space. More importantly, although many pieces of equipment claim to promote ‘all-around fitness’ only the K-bells deliver: strength, explosiveness, flexibility, endurance, and fat loss without the dishonor of dieting and aerobics, all in one tight package.



Last but not least is ‘the dinosaur factor’. Kettlebells—as brutish and unforgiving as Stonehenge rocks—are your escape from the sad world of soft hands and namby-pamby, lesser men.

In a 1930s classic Russian novel, *The Golden Taurus* by Ilf and Petrov, two small timers after a quick ruble search through the modest household of a man they suspect of being a millionaire. Finally the dorks steal his kettlebell and saw it in half hoping it is cast of pure gold. There is no gold inside the kettlebell. Only raw power, android work capacity, and an immortal’s ability to tolerate physical punishment. Moscow trusts no tears.



THE PROGRAM MINIMUM

When the Communists were plotting their coup on the verge of the XX century, they had a *program maximum*, for total domination—and a *program minimum*, for the most important and immediate concerns.

You may be set on rippling muscles and global domination. Fine, when you succeed, I insist you appoint me your Minister of Pain.

But if you will settle for:

- a lean body
- a heart and lungs that would make Dr. Cooper proud
- a back of steel
- and bones invincible to osteoporosis and most other ailments

then, here is your program-minimum.

Get a light dumbbell, say ten pounds for an average lady and two to three times as much for a gentleman, and do one arm snatches two to three times a week followed by ab work and back and hamstring stretches. Do as much as you can stand; the sets, reps, and rest periods are up to you. Just make sure to have your heart checked beforehand and slowly ease into the program. And do not forget to synchronize your breathing with your movement, otherwise you will wilt in no time flat.

The one arm snatch will work as many muscles as a single exercise could. It strengthens the back, from the tips of your traps all the way down to your butt, every bit as well as the deadlift.

If you were to pick a second exercise, make it the bent press or a similar drill. I agree with York Barbell Company founder, Bob Hoffman who wrote before World War II, “To build a superman, slow movements and quick lifts are required... I have a fondness for two particular lifts. The two hands snatch and the bent press. The two hands snatch... is the best single exercise in existence when practiced as a repetition movement in various forms [read the one-arm snatch —P.T.]. The bent press brings into play every muscle of your physique and builds superstrength through all the body.



“...if you desire improved strength and better bodily proportions,” continues Hoffman forcefully, “ these two lifts should be part of your training regime. If no other exercises were practiced, just the bent press and exercises that lead up to it [read the windmill, the side press, etc. –P.T.], and the two hands snatch and exercises which build proficiency in its performance [such as snatch pulls –P.T.] you would become a superman. For men who practice these lifts are superpowerful, possess great bodily strength and all around athletic ability.

There are many good exercises. Most of them have merit. But a man could build a beautiful body, ideal proportions, and great physical ability if he did nothing in the exercise line except the bent press—and exercises which lead to proficiency in it and the two hands snatch—with the exercises that build ability in that quick lift.

I can’t urge you too strongly to include both of these lifts in your training program.”

Comrade, if you are ambitious and not afraid to flex your muscles and your brain, the kettlebell program-maximum will be revealed to you in the next chapter.

You’ll own an awesome physique, ready for almost anything life could throw at you—even the authentic Russian sport of wrestling bears. No joke, it was huge in the XVI and XVII centuries until Tsar Alexis Romanov outlawed this first extreme sport by a special decree in 1648. A small space was surrounded by a wooden wall and then by fans. A bear was released into the enclosure. Then a man would join him and start irritating the beast with a drum or some annoying, ethnic musical instrument, until the bear got mad and attacked. According to scientists A. Vorobyev and Y. Sorokin, who researched ancient chronicles, more often than not the man won.



THE RUSSIAN KETTLEBELL CHALLENGE WORKOUT: THE PROGRAM-MAXIMUM

To make the individual uncomfortable, that is my task.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

“I mistrust all systematizers and I avoid them,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche. “The will to a system is a lack of integrity.”

The German philosopher would have hit it off Trofim Lomakin, a world champion weightlifter from the 1950s. A square jawed Siberian, Lomakin would barely show up at the gym once or twice a week, mostly to check in with his boss. Then, three months before a USSR or a world championship, TL would kick up his training into high gear—and win. Lomakin remained world class for ten years, well into his thirties. “I have not met another athlete with such an animal instinct for the load,” recalls his teammate great Yuri Vlasov. “Lomakin was not interested in spread sheets and charts but picked ideal training loads without fail. He made fun of my calculations and of everyone who participated in my experiments. Tete-a-tete he would always say, “Get them away from you!..”

Who is right? The bean counter or the wild card? Lomakin was a great athlete, so was Vlasov. “Science does not begin until you start taking measurements,” said Russian chemist Dmitriy Mendeleyev, the author of the periodic table of elements. Yuri Vlasov, who teamed up with the great scientist Dr. Leonid Matveyev and coach extraordinaire Suren Bogdasarov, took this wisdom to heart. In 1958-1962 they paved the high road for Russian power sports by giving them a mathematical foundation.

It is hard to say what is right for you. If you prefer a structured routine, you will find more than one elsewhere in this book, from the simple armed forces schedules to the highly complicated ones from the *Weightlifting Yearbook*. If you are more of a free spirit or your lifestyle does not allow for a well planned out routine—I will give you my free style program borne out of necessity when I was in the military. Sometimes I would train in the aforementioned frozen cave. At other times it was ninety-degree heat in the *sushilka*, a room dedicated to



drying boots and foot wraps (the low-tech alternative to socks that the Russian army digs)—with but two hours of sleep.

Obviously I had to adapt my training to the surprises life in uniform would throw at me. Following is a set of flexible guidelines that worked very well in spite of the terrible training conditions.



The Top Ten Russian Kettlebell Challenge Training Guidelines



- 1. Train 2-7 times a week.** Try to complete your workout in 45 min or less. Vary the length of your workouts, for example Monday 30 min, Tuesday 45 min, Wednesday 20 min, Thursday off, Friday 35 min.
- 2. Each session do as few or as many exercises as you wish but do not work equally hard on every one of them.** For example, on Monday do a lot of sets of the bent press, on Tuesday skip the bent press or take it easy and work hard on snatches, etc. Do not be overly pedantic about the order. Just do not do one pet feat at the expense of everything else all the time. Also, do not be afraid to make some workouts relatively easier than others.
- 3. Perform your exercises in a circuit.** Allow at least a few minutes of rest between the sets; do not rush if your focus is strength. Compress the rest periods to favor endurance, muscular and cardiovascular, over strength. Do not practice exercises which require great coordination, e.g. the bent press, if you choose brief rest periods.
- 4. The order of the drills in the rotation is up to you** but it is a good idea to alternate harder and easier (for you) exercises and/or sets. For example, do a set of five reps in the difficult military press, then ten reps in the relatively easy two-arm snatch pull.
- 5. Start your practice with the most technically demanding exercises,** e.g. the two hands anyhow. Do not engage in any endurance activities before your kettlebell practice.
- 6. The total number of sets is up to you,** anywhere from three to as many as twenty sets per exercise are acceptable but should be varied.



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7. **Never go to failure but vary the difficulty of your sets.** For example, your estimated best in the side press is four reps. Some sets do one or two reps, others three. Play by the seat of your pants.
 8. **Generally perform no more than five reps per set** in various presses and side bends. It is better to increase the difficulty by upgrading to a heavier kettlebell, selecting a more difficult press (e.g. the military rather than the side press), moving slower, pausing at different points of the lift, compressing the rest periods between the sets, or performing more sets of five reps. Use the above techniques by themselves or in any sensible combination.
 9. **Snatches, cleans and jerks can be performed for any number of repetitions, from one to hundreds.** Leave all the sets of more than ten reps for the very end of the workout to avoid their negative effect on your presses. The exception is when your presses have become too easy and you have not saved up for a heavier kettlebell yet. Understand that performing strength drills on the background of pronounced fatigue is only marginally effective.
 10. **Periodically speed up or slow down the movement from the comfortable pace.** For example, snatch at the limit of your explosiveness or at a near stall. When pressing, lowering the kettlebell fast but lifting it slow or vice versa is an option. If you have been following the *Power to the People!* workout, alternate a 2-4 week period of kettlebell training with a PTP cycle.

A few explanations are in order.

1. **Train 2-7 times a week.** Try to complete your workout in 45 min or less. Vary the length of your workouts, for example Monday 30 min, Tuesday 45 min, Wednesday 20 min, Thursday off, Friday 35 min.

Most *gireviks* train three to four times a week but you have some leeway. You can make great gains on just two weekly workouts. But if you are in the military or law enforcement or you are a serious athlete you will be better off training daily; you will get a lot less sore. Naturally, do less than you would if you trained less frequently.

Regarding the duration, in the beginning you may be shot in less than ten minutes, so obviously ease into it. You do not need overuse injuries in your shoulders, elbows, or elsewhere. Use your head. Breaking up the length of your



sessions makes it easier to adapt your training to the surprises of your day-to-day life and your well-being. It also serves as a tool to stimulate progress. Manipulating the length of a session is an indirect way to manipulate the training load. Varying the latter from day to day helps to make quicker progress, according to Russian scientists, such as former weightlifting world champion Prof. Arkady Vorobyev. Besides, it is easier on your head to have an occasional killer workout in the midst of lighter training.

Do not freak out about training the same movement or the same body part for two or more days in a row. It is a standard operating procedure among Russian athletes. For example, the Russian National Powerlifting Team benches up to eight times a week. The key to successful frequent training is constant variation of the loading variables: weights, reps, sets, rest periods, tempo, exercise order, exercise selection, etc.

Do not be afraid to push into slight overtraining and then back off with lighter workouts. As a Lithuanian saying goes, “A river with a dam has more power.”

A controlled state of overtraining followed by easier training is THE most effective tool of strength development if used wisely. Most of the credit for this radical approach of *concentrated loading* goes to Prof. Yuri Verkhoshansky. Just make sure to carefully monitor your body’s reactions and have the sense not to dig too deep a hole. Ludvig Chaplinskiy wrote in the Russian magazine *Hercules* in 1913, “Kettlebell lifting more than any other sport relies on nerve strength; its sensible practice strengthens the nervous system, mindless practice destroys it.”

2. Each session, do as few or as many exercises as you wish but do not work equally hard on every one of them. For example, on Monday do a lot of sets of the bent press, on Tuesday skip the bent press or take it easy and work hard on snatches, etc. Do not be overly pedantic about the order. Just do not do one pet feat at the expense of everything else all the time. Also, do not be afraid to make some workouts relatively easier than others.

Difficulty variation is also encouraged within a workout. Here is what Hermann Goerner from Germany, one of the all time strength greats and a great fan of kettlebells, used to do:

“...He would usually start by working out through what in Germany we call “Die Kette”—The Chain—but this is no ordinary chain...” writes Edgar Mueller in *Goerner the Mighty*. “Down one side of the gymnasium is a row of [paired off] kettleweights... The kettleweights were placed in a row on the floor of the gymnasium, and working “Die Kette” (or The Chain) meant that Herman would start out by taking the first kettleweight in the right hand and swinging it to arm’s length overhead. After swinging it, the weight would be lowered to the



shoulder and then pressed up again and from there to the “hang” and then curled to the shoulder, then pressed overhead again and finally lowered again and replaced on the floor. He would then repeat it with the next kettleweight, using this time the left hand. The whole length of The Chain would be worked in this manner.”

Goerner had access to nineteen pairs of KBs ranging from less than 30 pounds to over 115. You can do just as well with three sets of kettlebells and a bit of Russian ingenuity. Perform whatever drill you have chosen, including mighty Goerner’s combination snatch/press/clean, for the prescribed reps. Start with the lightest kettlebell or bells (16kg). After a few seconds of rest—Goerner was “working fast all the while and not pausing to “natter” during his training session”—repeat the drill for the same number of reps with the next kettlebell up, or 24kg. Then 32kg, and start all over with 16kg. We called this powerful technique *lesyenka*, or ‘the ladder’, in *Spetsnaz*.

Note: you are not supposed to pyramid: 16, 24, 32, 32, 24, 16! Drop straight to the bottom right after reaching the top rung of the ladder: 16, 24, 32; 16, 24, 32; 16, 24, 32... You may rest a bit longer between each weight ladder.

Stick for the same rep count—Goerner favored sets of two reps and rarely went as high as six—for the light, medium, and heavy sets; do not rep out with the light bells. It goes without saying, five repetitions with 32kg are twice as hard as the same with 16kg, but that is intentional.

Constant loading and unloading is easier on your head and spurs greater gains. You can think of the ladder as a miniature power cycle compressed from weeks to minutes. Russian scientists such as Prof. Matveyev concluded that periodic gain and loss of sporting form is a law of physiology and it dictates a cyclical organization of the training process. The ladder, a highly effective power tool with serious science hiding behind the plain façade, brings periodization down to the smallest units of training—and delivers.

The number of ladders is up to you. One option is to separate your ladders with some other exercise or exercises.

Changing the exercise order, periodic elimination of some drills from the workout, and the introduction of unloading workouts is also encouraged.

Hermann Goerner “did not have or follow what might really be termed a ‘set’ training program,” continues the old book, “he always varied his workouts and mixed his work so much that one could truthfully say that he never worked through exactly the same program twice... At other times Herman would work through the Chain and vary the method of working out—for instance, he might



perform only Swings with each arm—he might do Swings with both arms, taking a pair of kettleweights at the same time—he might Swing a pair of the bells singlehanded grasping them both in one hand [take out a fat life insurance policy if you choose to try it. –P.T.]—he might Swing the weights held on the palm of the hand—Swing them from between the legs or outside the legs—again he might work through doing the Two Hands Anyhow, sometimes Swinging each weight, sometimes Pressing each weight overhead... At times he would practice also Cleaning and Swinging on one leg with either hand in turn, starting with the right leg when working with the right arm and vice versa with his left arm. Throughout the Clean or the Swing, he would be balanced entirely on one leg until the bell was replaced on the floor.”

As you can see, the variations are endless. If you get bored training with kettlebells, you have no imagination whatsoever.

If you wish to add *Power to the People!* or some other exercises to your kettlebell regimen you have a couple of choices. One is to plug your deadlifts into your kettlebell sessions and make them play by the same ten rules as long as you keep your reps to five and under. If you wish, you could add a couple of other exercises—one legged squats and pull-ups are *Spetsnaz* favorites—to your kettlebell regimen on the same terms. This applies to the exercises from the *Bullet-Proof Abs* program as well.

3. Perform your exercises in a circuit. Allow at least a few minutes of rest between the sets; do not rush if your focus is strength. Compress the rest periods to favor endurance, muscular and cardiovascular, over strength. Do not practice exercises which require great coordination, e.g. the bent press, if you choose brief rest periods.

High motor density, or the amount of work performed per unit of time is an important component of effective endurance training. Going from one exercise to another enables the trainee to handle a greater volume of training, thanks to the phenomenon of *fatigue specificity*. An athlete's ability to repeat the drill he has just performed recovers a lot slower than his ability to do other exercises, even if the same muscle groups are involved. In other words, a change of activity is a form of rest.

The important thing is not to rush from one drill to the next. Generally, allow up to two minutes of rest between sets. Otherwise you will fall into the old circuit training trap of beating the clock—and will seriously compromise your strength gains.



One option is a circuit, or going from one exercise to another after one set. Another, is to do a few sets of a drill, then do something else, and then come back for more. The practice of doing a few sets of squats, then some cleans, and coming back for more squats is pretty standard among Eastern European weightlifters. The Russian National Powerlifting Team usually starts their training session with bench presses, then works squats or deads, and finishes with more bench work.

There may be another reason why not doing many sets of one drill in a row—something called the spacing hypothesis—may boost your strength, but I'm not going to extrapolate on this quite yet.

4. The order of the drills in the rotation is up to you but it is a good idea to alternate harder and easier (for you) exercises and/or sets. For example, do a set of five reps in the difficult military press, then ten reps in the relatively easy two-arm snatch pull.

No comments.

5. Start your practice with the most technically demanding exercises, e.g. the two hands anyhow. Do not engage in any endurance activities before your kettlebell practice.

Again, common sense.

6. The total number of sets is up to you, anywhere from three to as many as twenty sets per exercise are acceptable but should be varied.

These are very rough guidelines. Listen to your body. Do not be embarrassed to start with one set; it is going to be rough.

7. Never go to failure but vary the difficulty of your sets. For example, your estimated best in the side press is four reps. Some sets do one or two reps, others three. Play by the seat of your pants.

I dedicated a whole chapter in *Power to the People!* to the many reasons why training to failure is a dumb idea, so I will not repeat myself.

Varying the set difficulty or relative intensity manipulates the load for greater gains. For instance, you could test your limit (stop a rep before failure) on the one arm snatch but do only half the reps you could do with the pedal to the metal on the military press (50% relative intensity).



Consider the ‘rep ladder’, another Russian Special Forces favorite, as a fine technique of varying the relative intensity. It does not require multiple kettlebells.

Do a rep and set the weight down. Rest for as long as it would take another comrade to do what you just did. Then two reps. Then three... When things get really ugly start all over at one or move on to the next exercise. As an option, you may terminate the ladder at an earlier chosen rep count instead of fighting till the bitter end.

8. Generally perform no more than five reps per set in various presses and side bends. It is better to increase the difficulty by upgrading to a heavier kettlebell, selecting a more difficult press (e.g. the military rather than the side press), moving slower, pausing at different points of the lift, compressing the rest periods between the sets, or performing more sets of five reps. Use the above techniques by themselves or in any sensible combination.

Once again, please see *Power to the People!* if you want to know the rationale behind very low reps for slow exercises. Although many Russian kettlebell programs, including those quoted in this book, do recommend higher reps, I stand by my conviction that very low reps are safer and more effective for drills like presses.

9. Snatches, cleans, and jerks can be performed for any number of repetitions, from one to hundreds. Leave all the sets of more than ten reps for the very end of the workout, to avoid their negative effect on your presses. The exception is when your presses have become too easy and you have not saved up for a heavier kettlebell yet. Understand that performing strength drills on the background of pronounced fatigue is only marginally effective.

Ballistic drills, at least with kettlebells, can get away with much greater numbers; it is a lot easier to keep your technique in the groove.

10. Periodically speed up or slow down the movement from the comfortable pace. For example, snatch at the limit of your explosiveness or at a near stall. When pressing, lowering the kettlebell fast but lifting it slow or vice versa is an option.

Russian researcher S. Lelikov discovered in 1975 that strength programs that vary the exercise tempo are much more effective than those that do not.



THE KETTLEBELL DRILLS

"A jolly game of taming iron"

WARNING!

Most kettlebell exercises can be dangerous and even fatal. Do not hesitate get rid of your kettlebell(s) if you are about to lose control or/and something goes wrong, e.g. your shoulder is about to get wrenched. Drop the kettlebell(s) or, if your body is in the position where it might get hit, e.g. under the weight, vigorously push the kettlebell(s) away from your body and let the kettlebell(s) fall. Falling kettlebell(s) may damage property. If dropped on a hard surface, kettlebell(s) may be damaged too. It is strongly recommended that you practice on a soft surface outdoors.

EXPLODE!

- Swing/snatch pull
- Clean
- Snatch
- Under the leg pass
- Jerk, C&J
- Jump shrug

GRIND!

- Military press
- One hundred ways to cook the military press
- Floor pullover and press
- Good morning stretch
- Windmill
- Side press
- Bent press

"When trainees perfect their technique with kettlebell exercises, they develop agility and the ability to move efficiently with minimal energy expenditure," states the armed forces manual. "Thus acquired experience positively affects not only the athletic results but successful performance of professional military techniques and actions. That is why one should not only pay attention to strength development alone but also to the technique of the strength exercises."



EXPLORE

Swing/snatch pull

David Willoughby, a weightlifting champion from the 1920s and a man of unquestionable authority on the iron game, stated that the two-arm swing “brings into action and develops practically every group of muscles on the back of the body and legs, and a good many others besides... If you have time on your schedule for only one back exercise, make it this one...”

The swing is a great way to learn your way around a kettlebell and get prepared for the more difficult snatch.

Pick up a kettlebell with both arms, keeping your knees slightly bent, your back arched, your head up, and the weight on your heels.



Good Form: Pick up a kettlebell with both arms, keeping your knees slightly bent, your back arched, your head up, and the weight on your heels.

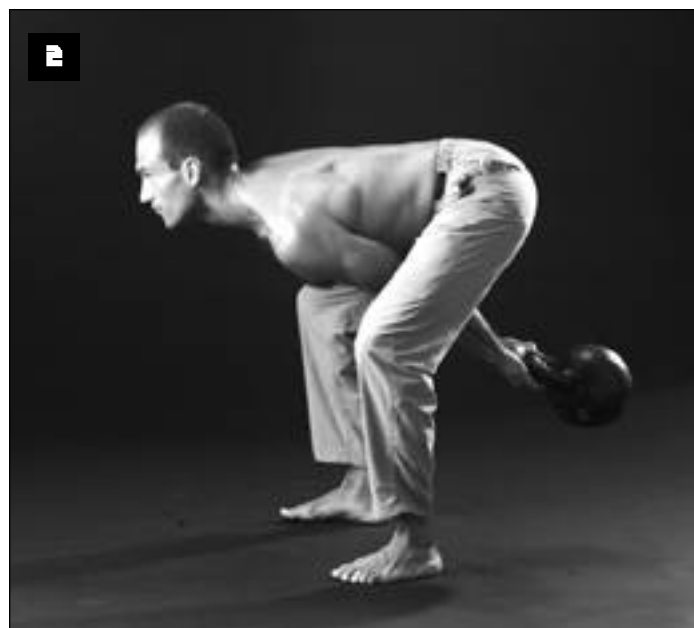


Poor Form: Back curved, looking down and legs locked

1



Swing the bell back between your legs. Observe how the weight remains on the heels and the shins are vertical. You should feel that the K-bell is pulling you backward and loading your hamstrings. The position illustrated is essential to master; if you let your knees protrude forward you will never get the leverage to bring your hips in on the action.

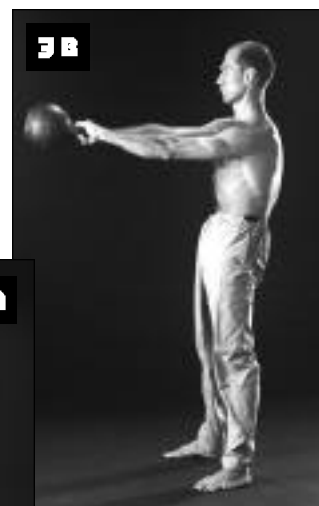


Snap the hips through by contracting your glutes explosively, a motion similar to a vertical jump. Visualize jumping up and at the same time projecting the girya straight ahead with the power of your hips. The height of the pull may vary: level with your waist...



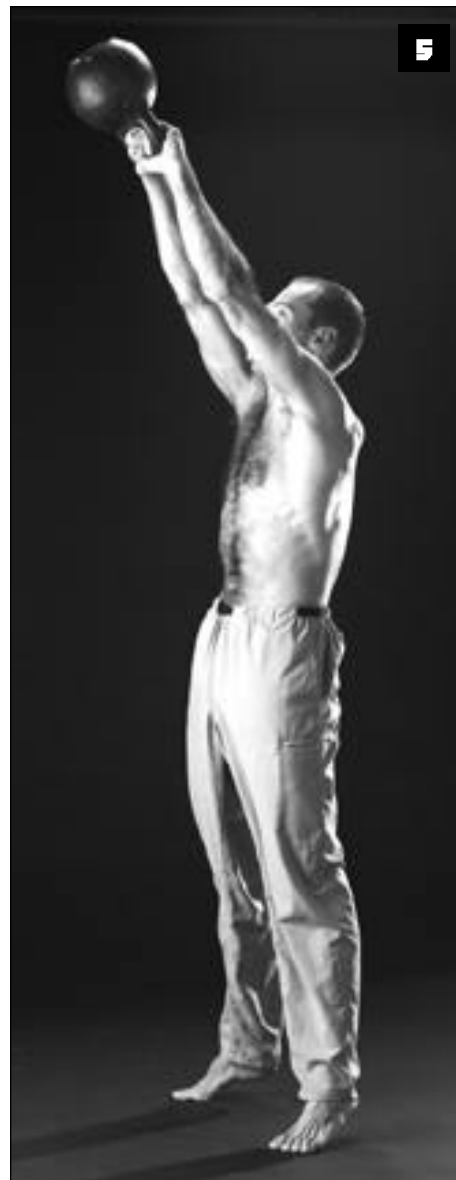
level with your chest...

and above your head...



You can even pull it straight up, if you feel confident that you can reverse the movement before the kettlebell flicks over and hurts your wrists (the handle may not be wide enough for two hands in that position). If you do get that high make sure that you do not lean back—that applies to all kettlebell drills across the board.

Note how you may end up on your tip toes as you express your power upward. Great, just make sure to rock back on your heels as the bell comes down.



When you reach the top of the movement, immediately let the bell free fall to the spot slightly below and behind your knees. Once that destination is reached, proceed with the next rep without hesitation. No pause at all; you have touched a hot stove!

When it comes to high rep ballistics, the armed forces manual recommends inhaling when the body is opening up and encourages rib cage expansion—trunk and hip extension, movement of the arms up or out—and exhaling when it is closing down, forward bending and kettlebell lowering. I am not going to be as dogmatic, but I want to stress how important is to synchronize your breathing with the movement somehow. If you fail to find a rhythm you will not be able to keep up for long.

Once you have mastered the two-arm swing you should try the one arm version. You may pass the bell from hand to hand on the bottom or, if you are not pulling higher than your head, on the top of the pull.

An interesting variation of the one arm pull calls for swinging your kettlebell outside your knee. Be careful, as this could be dangerous to your knees—watch out for a crash! A two arm/two kettlebell swing outside the knees—the movement is similar to the arm action of an accelerating downhill skier—is also a treat. It goes without saying that all weird permutations must wait until you have your kettlebell basics down pat.



A variation of the two-arm/two kettlebell drill—the true snatch pull if you want to get technical—calls for keeping the bell close to the body, keeping its bottom down, and bending the arms as much as necessary, on route to the finished position.



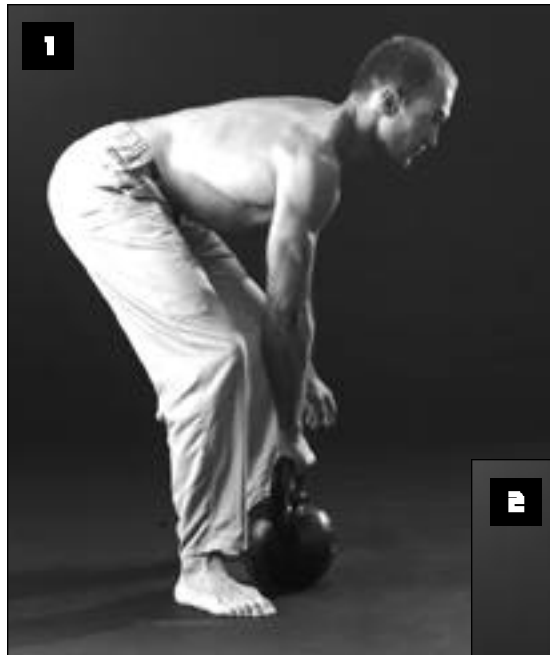
Although some comrades, including Russian hand-to-hand combat expert and *Spetsnaz* veteran Anatoly Taras, perform this exercise with one arm—your thumbs get strong among other things—I urge you against it. You may end up dropping the kettlebell on your head; the grip in this position is iffy if only one hand is doing the job. True kettlebell snatches with the bell flicking over the wrist are harder and safer.

Once you have finished a workout that involves swings or snatches, stretch your back and hamstrings. You will be grateful you have. Perform the stretch of your choice, or, better yet, the stretch of my choice from my book *Relax into Stretch* or its companion video. Stretching your inner thighs would not hurt either. Alright, who am I kidding? It will hurt, but at least you will have a fighting chance of getting out of bed the morning after, without help. In case you are wondering how your hip adductors could be involved in a pulling motion, you are about to find out the hard way.

If someone you know is considering taking up kettlebell lifting but cannot make up his mind to invest in a book, a tape, and kettlebells, make him or her a believer by teaching swings with a dumbbell



Clean



The clean draws its name from the requirement to bring the weight to your shoulders in one 'clean' movement.

Pick up the kettlebell off the floor, the same way you would for the one arm swing. Note that the starting position for all the pulls, swings, cleans, and snatches is identical.



Swing the kettlebell back and then immediately toward your shoulder.

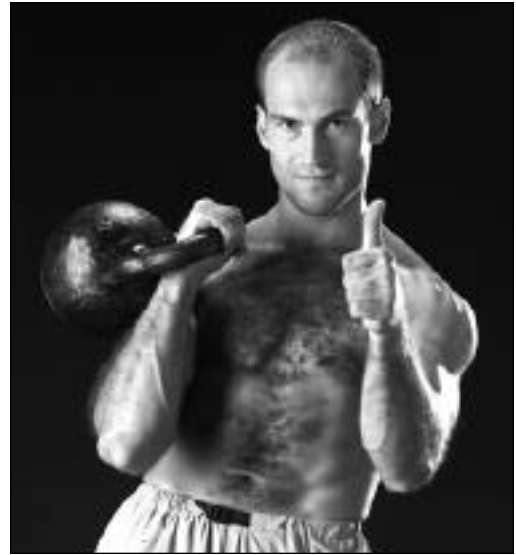




Right before the hunk of iron has reached its destination quickly dip your knees and get under it. This action has been compared to putting on a sweater. Finish in the position shown.



Pay attention to the proper wrist angle at the completion of the drill. Imagine that you are trying to wrap your fist in your forearm, toward the inside of your elbow. If you let your wrists hang free, as is your natural lazy tendency, you will be a hurting unit in no time flat. Some Russian *gireviks* have done this in the past, because relaxing their wrists on the impact helped eke out more reps in their ballistic lifts. Their reward was to develop a whole laundry list of problems, including joint hernias. And the correct answer is..... strength and focus. Sorry, nice try—wrist wraps are not the solution!



Pay attention to the proper wrist angle at the completion of the drill. Good form above. Poor form below

The neutral wrist alignment applies to all the KB drills: cleans, snatches, jerks, presses, you name it. “..the swinging of kettlebells requires a strong forearm and wrist...,” observed ‘Russian Lion’ Hackenschmidt—and now you know he was not kidding.

If you do the drill correctly you will barely feel the impact of the bell on your forearm. If you do not—you will get bruised or worse. Consider wearing a thick sweatshirt or something along those lines, in the beginning—although Russians never do.



The key to efficient and painless shock absorption is good technique. Every Independence Day my wife Julie’s family gathers at her aunt Tootsie and uncle John’s cabin near Duluth, Minnesota. The balloon toss is always a part of the holiday program. Couples get balloons filled with water and start passing them between them. After every throw, everyone takes a step back. Sooner or later overfilled balloons get busted. Whoever keeps theirs alive wins the jackpot.



Shortly after you start playing this game, you realize that simply catching the blob is as good as throwing it against the wall. A sudden stop generates high Gs and bursts the bubble. You quickly learn to barely touch the balloon and rapidly retreat with it, to absorb the shock over a distance rather than in a dead stop.

By the same token, the shock of the kettlebell coming down on your forearm should be absorbed by a long and smooth braking action of the knee dip, performed as the bell is flipping over the wrist and hitting the forearm. It is equally important to bring your elbow down as low as possible and press your arm against the ribs. An arm 'disconnected' from the body punishes the shoulder.

At no point lean back! That applies to ALL the KB drills! And always brace your abs and glutes on impact!

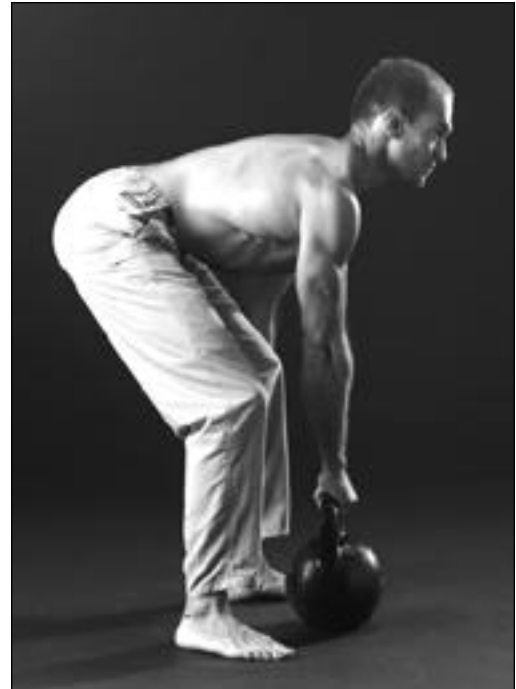
Drop the kettlebell between your knees and continue the set. Ease into cleans and watch your elbows as you drop the girya. You may find that squeezing the handle quickly at the lowest point helps to protect the elbows.



At no point lean back! That applies to ALL the KB drills!

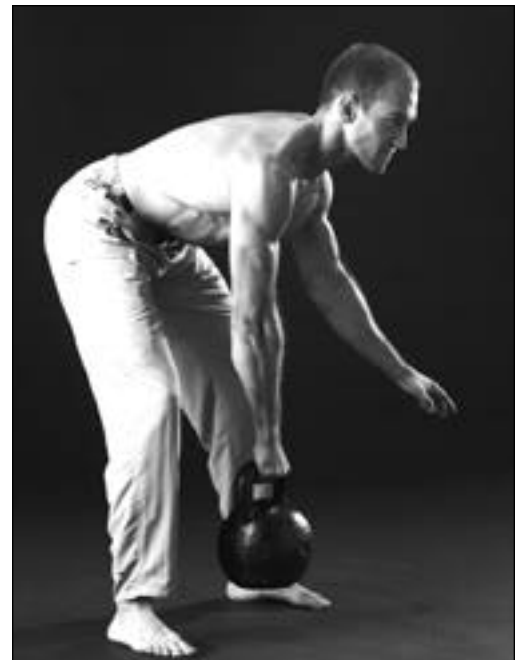


One way of making the clean tougher is to pull the dead weight straight from the floor, without a pre-swing: the dead clean.



Another approach is to clean from a dead hang: the hang clean. Make sure to tighten up your whole body as much as possible before the pull.

Catching the weight on a dime adds a nice touch to hang cleans. Pause until the inertia dissipates, flex, and clean again.



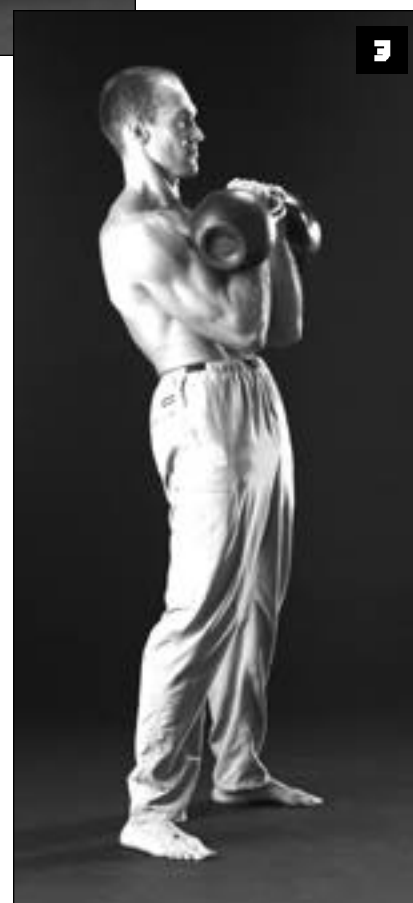


The two K-bells clean is evil. Prof. Arkady Vorobyev conducted an experiment and learned that even an experienced weightlifter's heart rate went through the roof following a set of ten cleans with two 32kg kettlebells—and did not come back down even after ten minutes of rest. Do not tackle it until the one arm version has been mastered down pat.

Straddle two bells sitting side by side. You will have to use a slightly wider stance than for the one arm clean. Get down to the bells in the same position you would use in the sumo deadlift. Inhale, tighten up, and pull explosively, first with your legs, then from the elbows. Dip slightly—that makes it a so-called power clean—and get under the weights with a simultaneous flick of your wrists.

You will end up with your elbows in front of you, closer together than in a barbell clean, and the kettlebells resting on tops of your forearms. Be certain to tighten your abs when you accept the shock of the weights. It applies to all ballistic KB drills.

Next drop the weights down between your legs while going down into a semi-squat. Let the bells swing between your paws, then clean them again. If repeated enough times, two-bell cleans will make you a man!





My favorite type of clean should be outlawed as a violation of the Fifth Amendment. Use a light bell and catch it bottom up by gripping the handle violently. A vise-like hand will be your reward.

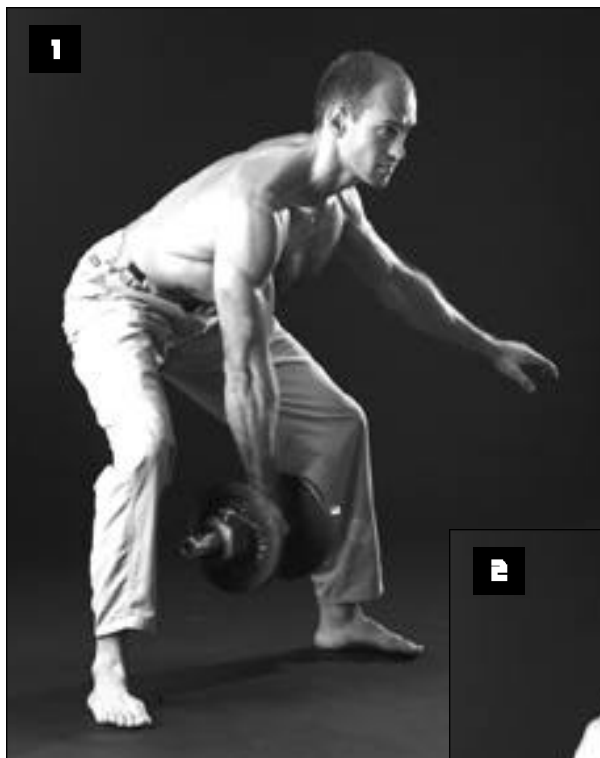
If you are interested in building gorilla traps and shoulders, try seated hang cleans:

Sit on the edge of a narrow bench, knees together, a light kettlebell in each hand, hanging to the sides of your body. Raise your ribcage and explosively drive your elbows toward the ceiling. Snap your arms under, and catch the weights in the same manner as you did when practicing cleans.

Since you do not have the luxury of dispersing the shock of the impact by squatting under, push the kettlebells away the moment they touch your shoulders. Drop them with the 'climb the fence' maneuver, where your

elbows go up before the bells come down. Catch the bells at the point where your arms are almost straight, and continue without a pause either on the top or on the bottom of the movement. Keep your abs tight throughout the exercise and make sure not to lean back. As with the other high rep explosive drills, let your breathing take care of itself.





Dumbbell cleans might work but not nearly as well as KB ones. Without flipping the weight over, the drill deteriorates into a cheat curl.



Snatch

The one-arm snatch is the Tsar of kettlebell lifts, fluid and vicious. It will quickly humble even studly powerlifters. The forces generated by this drill are awesome. “How can it be if the weight is so light?” you might ask. –Through great acceleration and deceleration. $F=ma$, force equals mass multiplied by acceleration. Would you rather roll a 500 pound barbell over your toes or drop a 72 pounder from seven feet? I rest my case.

You can think of the snatch as a clean to the point above your head. Do not even think about taking it on until you have mastered one arm swings and cleans!

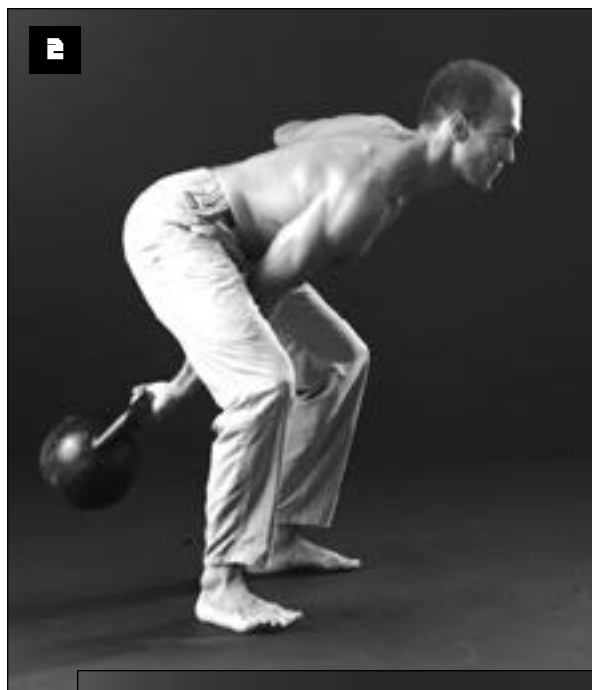
Stand over a kettlebell, your feet about shoulder width apart, your weight on your heels. Inhale, arch your back, push your butt back, and bend your knees. Reach for the bell with one hand, the arm straight, while keeping the other arm away from your body (initially you may help yourself by pushing with the free hand against your thigh but it is considered ‘no class’ by most *gireviks*).



1



Swing the bell back and whip it straight overhead in one clean movement. Note that the pulling arm will bend and your body will shift to the side opposite to the weight. But you do not need to worry about trying to do it that way; just pull straight up and your body will find an efficient path in a short while.



Do not lift with your arm, but rather with your hips. Project the force straight up, rather than back—as in a jump. You may end up airborne or at least on your toes. It is OK as long as you roll back on your heels by the time the bell comes down.





Dip under the K-bell as it is flipping over the wrist. Absorb the shock the same way you did for cleans.

Fix the weight overhead, in the press behind the neck position for a second, then let it free fall between your legs as you are dropping into a half squat. Keep the girya near your body when it comes down. As an option, lower the bell to your shoulder before dropping it between the legs.



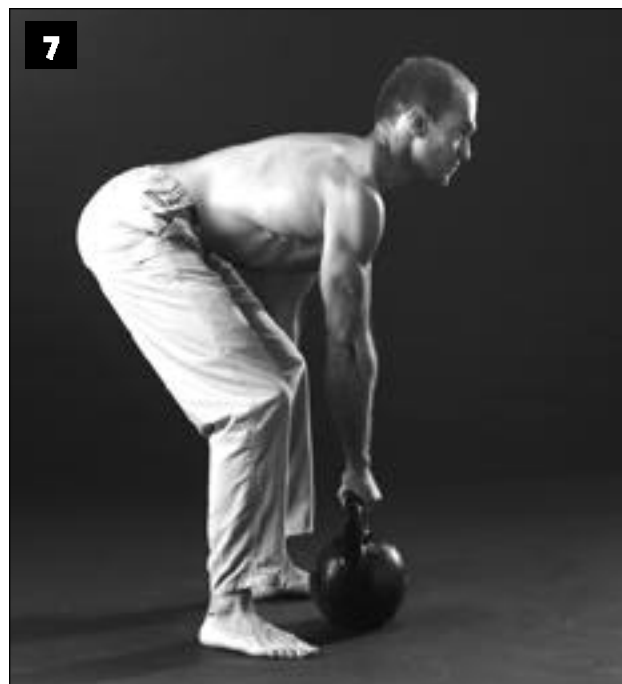
Ease into the one arm power snatch because even a hardcore deadlifter's hamstrings and palms are guaranteed to take a beating. Especially if your kettlebells are rusty like the ones I trained with at the 'courage corner'. It was a long time after my discharge before my palms finally lost their rust speckled calluses.



Unlike the deadlift, the kettlebell snatch does not impose prohibitively strict requirements on spinal alignment and hamstring flexibility. If you are deadlifting with a humped over back you are generally asking for trouble; KB snatches let you get away with a slightly flexed spine. It is probably due to the fact that your connective tissues absorb shock more effectively when loaded rapidly. Your ligaments have wavy structures. A ballistic shock—as long as it is of a reasonable magnitude—is absorbed by these ‘waves’, which straighten out like springs.

But if you keep the load on the ligament for more than a fraction of a second, the slack gets pulled out of the ligaments and makes them predisposed to tearing. Which is why you have no business jerking your weights when performing grinding type drills like deadlifts. Your ligaments may absorb the initial impulsive loading by losing their ‘waves’ but by the time you get the bar to your knees you will be ready for the emergency room.

You can add misery to your snatches with the same method you used for cleans: snatch the dead weight without a pre-swing. Tighten your body, and rip the weight off the floor and straight over your head in one movement. Or from a hang. Drop the bell and stop it on a dime slightly below your knees, pause until the momentum dissipates, tighten up and snatch again. Snatching a dead ringweight kneeling in the sand is a proper treat, especially for your deltoids. Ditto for the clean.





Extending the range of motion by standing on sturdy boxes is dandy.



And snatching two K-bells at once is truly poetry in motion! Do not mess with it for a long time and remember to use the lightest kettlebells to start with. Some comrades prefer swinging them between the knees, others outside the legs. Either way expect no joy. Do not bang the bells together.



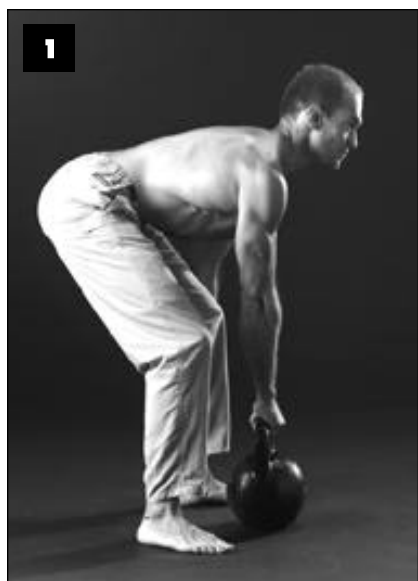
Unless you have received proper instruction from a weightlifting coach, do not do full squat kettlebell snatches or cleans. You might however try split-style snatches, cleans, or jerks. Instead of dipping in a half squat to catch the bells, vigorously split your feet apart and land in a lunge. The width and depth of the lunge depends on your agility and flexibility. Be prepared to take a fall and watch those ankles.

You may snatch or do any other KB drill with your eyes shut which will increase the exercise difficulty and improve your strength for obscure motor learning reasons that I explain in *Power to the People!: Russian Strength Training Secrets for Every American*. The standard protocol is to go blind every other set.



Under the leg pass

This drill—a favorite of the Russian military—unexpectedly works the midsection. Lift a kettlebell, and start passing it from hand to hand between and around your legs in circles and eights. Note that the weight stays mostly on your heels; you should look like you are playing tug of war. Breathe shallow but sharp, in sync with the weight transfer.



Jerk, Clean & Jerk

You may jerk one or two KBs. Naturally, learn the one arm version first.

Once you have cleaned the bell(s), dip your knees slightly and throw them upward.





If you have successfully locked out your elbows, without rebending your knees once more, you have completed a 'push jerk'. If the weight is heavy for you or you start getting tired, you will have to resort to a 'power jerk'.



Push yourself away explosively from the weights, getting down into a half squat when the kettlebells are halfway to the top. This seems tricky, but once you have done enough reps you will figure it out the hard way.





Don't press out the weights (although a jerk with a press-out makes for another decent exercise). Fix the lockout for a second, then let the bells come back down to your shoulders, dipping your knees and tightening up on the impact.

In any type of jerk, it helps to 'lean forward' against the weight as it is passing your head. The elbows will lock out more efficiently and the K-bells will be fixed in the advantageous press behind the neck position.



The one-arm jerk works the same way. Old time Russian strong man and wrestler George Hackenschmidt advised on the one-arm jerk: “The elbow should rest firmly against the hip, thus transferring the whole weight... to the legs, principally to the one leg. Quickly bend the knees, and, at the same time, ‘throw’ the weight upwards, while with the same quick movement you stretch the arm. You will find that the legs will give the principal impetus of strength. The movements have to be made very quickly. This particular exercise requires a certain technique. It greatly furthers the preservation of a perfect nimbleness and equilibrium, and develops at the same time the muscles of the leg, forearm, and triceps.”

For double brutality, do your cleans and jerks back to back, non-stop. Bring a puke bag. “If you think a heavy squat program is work just try high reps “puff and pant” clean and jerks,” commented *Ironman* editor Peary Rader half a century ago. “The clean and jerk involves nearly every muscle in the body—more so than any other exercise we know of.”



Jump shrug

Paul Chek is a consultant to many pro sports teams and a man of great insight on exercise technique. I recently discovered an article of his, describing an awesome drill which makes a perfect fit for your Russian Kettlebell Training. The man says—and you had better believe him! —that it’s an excellent way “to improve his or her vertical jump, Olympic lift, ability to throw people out of the bar, or to increase the mass of their upper traps.”

Deadlift two kettlebells outside your thighs in the groove you would use for a vertical jump. Dip your knees as if you are about to jump up. Snap your hips through and straighten out your knees explosively as if you are jumping. At the same time violently shrug your shoulders up. You may end up airborne, or at least your heels will leave the floor. Softly land on the balls of your feet, then squat and roll back on your heels before the next take-off. At a rapid clip, naturally.

For your neck’s sake, Chek warns you against poking your head forward like an ostrich. And yes, expect your traps to feel like they have been beaten up with baseball bats the day after.



GAIN

Military Press



Clean the bell to your shoulder to start with. Maximally tighten your body on impact. It is not just about shock absorption; bracing for the weight will make the kettlebell feel like a toy in your hand and your muscles will be powerfully loaded for action.

One of the top reasons comrades get injured in the gym is the idiotic notion of ‘isolation’.

Put it to rest, isolation is neither possible nor desirable. Make a fist. A white-knuckle fist! Observe how tension involuntarily overflows from your forearm into your biceps, shoulder, even the pec. This is the neat ‘muscle software’, called *irradiation*, at work (see *Power to the*

People!: *Russian Strength Training Secrets for Every American* book for a detailed explanation). Counterintuitively, contracting muscles other than the ones directly responsible for the task at hand—the deltoids and triceps in the case of the military press—does not take away from the prime movers’ power, but amplifies it! Especially if it is the abs and glutes that you are flexing.



In case you think that getting more juice into your arms by clenching your cheeks is preposterous, try this party trick. Give your friend the hardest handshake you can muster (for obvious reasons the guinea pig had better have a sturdy hand that can take it). Shake off the tension, rest for a minute, then repeat the test. This time, in addition to trying to demolish your comrade's paw, flex your glutes as if you are trying to pinch a coin, 'tuck your tail under', and brace your abs for an imaginary punch. Expect a mighty 'Ouch!'

Having learned that extra tension adds power now find a way of maximizing that tension. One technique is bracing, or tightening up your muscles before the load is upon them.

A good arm-wrestler loads all his muscles with high-strung tension before the ref yells 'Go!' A great arm-wrestler will load even before he grips up with his opponent. And an amateur who waits for the referee's command to pull before turning on his biceps finds himself pinned without knowing what has hit him.

Conduct another experiment. Get down in a pushup position, elbows locked. Have a comrade push down on your shoulders a few times. Note how heavy the pressure felt. Now brace yourself, flex your whole body, and have your buddy push again with the same amount of force. You will not even notice the pressure!

The lesson to learn is to brace yourself while the bell is still in the air, not when it hits you. Houdini could take anyone's punch if he was prepared for it. He died when he got struck without warning.

To get the most out of your press, while putting the least amount of distress on your shoulder, you must start the press with your working shoulder maximally pressed down—the opposite of a shrug—and your elbow pushed down as low as it can go. At the same time, pull the elbow slightly inward toward your belly button. This maneuver from the arsenal of Russian weightlifters—a so-called *obtyazhka*—pre-stretches the delts. As a result you will be stronger; *Starling's Law* states that a pre-stretched muscle has more ummph. You will also evenly work all the three heads of the deltoid rather than just the overworked front one, and will do it through a maximal range of motion. It sure has worked for Arnold Schwarzenegger. He presses his dumbbells from the curl position and twists his palms forward as the bells go up. This style became known in the West as 'the Arnold Press'.

Look at the photos and observe that the hip is slightly kicked over to the side to get positioned straight under the bell. It is time you understood that pressing a heavy weight overhead while standing at attention is a fantasy. Even a 'certified' personal trainer cannot repeal Newtonian physics. The downward



pressure of the weight must be projected over your feet, at least if you do not feel like toppling over.

Maybe you can keep your waist relaxed and upright and still make it—if you are pressing a Malibu Ken & Barbie color-coded dumbbell with your little finger sticking out. But when the iron adds up the scenario changes.

In the photo I am pressing 72 pounds. Had I weighted 350 pounds myself I probably could have played the Ken and Barbie isolation game, anchored by the sheer mass. But I weigh only 180. Had I not pushed my hip under the bell and flexed my midsection, I would have been down on my butt in a jiffy.



Realize that displacing the hips sideways does not give you an excuse to lean back; the latter is plain bad news for your back. An intense ab and glute contraction will help you to avoid leaning back, no matter how heavy is the weight.





Do not press the bell straight up; your delts will have no leverage. Visualize pushing outward with your elbow—sort of a lateral raise—while keeping your forearm vertical, rather than angled toward your head. It is elementary mechanics, Watson; you will never press a heavy weight overhead unless you keep the forearm vertical. Consider almost overdoing it the other way: push the weight away from your body almost to the point where it falls sideways. You will recruit more muscles in the effort, even your biceps.

Squeeze the *girya* as you press it and remember to keep your wrist tight. Make sure that the bell's handle

rests on the meaty spot at the very base of your palm on the little finger side. When pressure stimulates the mechanoreceptors at that site they send a command to the triceps to contract more intensely, a so-called *extensor reflex*.



Keep your shoulder pressed down as much as possible throughout the press. It may help to visualize that you are pushing yourself away from the weight rather than pressing it up. Or concentrate on keeping your lat flexed.

You should have taken a breath before you even cleaned the weight—75% of your lungs' vital capacity is optimal, according to Prof. Arkady Vorobyev. Hold your breath until you fix the bell overhead. If you breathe with the kettlebell on your chest, you will lose tension. Obviously, if you have high blood pressure, a heart condition, or some other health concerns, this may not be an option. Consult with your doctor on the breathing pattern most appropriate for you.





When you are exerting yourself, always contract your rectal sphincter, as if you are trying to stop yourself from going to the bathroom. I explained the reasons behind this madness in *Power to the People!*

Finish the lift slow and tight and lock out the elbow firmly. Do not even bother to listen to the nervous Nellies who tell you to never lock your joints. Leave them alone with their pencilneck weights and hypochondria. The joints need strengthening as much as the muscles and locking out is the way to do it.

Let some air out, take some in, and head back to earth. If you are doing high rep presses—not that you ever should in my opinion—you may exhale on the way down through pursed lips or a partially constricted throat.

There is more to lowering a weight than meets the eye. In order to keep your shoulder in an ‘anti-

shrug’ actively pull your elbow down, all the way to your navel. Quite literally, pull the bell down with your lat. Read all the instructions many times before tackling the weight; there are no minor points here.

Once the girya is at its lowest point, drop it to clean and press it again. At least in the beginning—or when you use a bell that is heavy for you—clean it before each press. You will find that the clean loads more spring into your pressing muscles and helps to keep your waist tight.

Eventually, you may choose to do reps off your shoulder, although I am not a fan of them. Let some air out when the bell lands on your chest, take another breath, and press again.



Just to give you something to shoot for, old-timer Pyotr Kryloff pressed a 32kg K-bell eighty-eight consecutive times. And thirty five year old Soviet teacher Mikhail Levchenko pressed the same size K-bell 700 times with his right! You have some work to do, Comrade.



One hundred ways to cook the military press

There are many ways to make the military press easier or harder. If you cannot strictly military press a given size kettlebell you have the following options.

The obvious is a negative, or yielding only, press. Jerk the bell overhead, squeeze it to pulp, and pull it down with complete control while tensing and flaring your lat. If you cannot control the descent you are way out of your league; find a lighter bell.

Perform multiple sets of one rep. Once you can do a very slow negative, add a three second pause at one or more places on the way down, especially your sticking point, probably where the upper arm is parallel to the ground.



Moscow bench press champion Alexey Moiseyev refers to this static/dynamic method as ‘a powerlifter’s secret weapon’ and promises, “Application of a combination of dynamic exercises with isometrics will enable you to reach maximal results in your lifts.”





You could use a little help from your legs and do a push press.

Working the start of the press statically is dandy. "...the way you improve is by lifting weights, the heaviest possible," quipped isometrics pioneer John Ziegler, M.D. "What's the heaviest weight you can lift? —One you can't lift!"



Once you have cleaned the bell to your shoulder, attempt to press the still-too-heavy weight for three or four seconds. Keep your sphincter contracted and hiss under high pressure; your tongue should be pressed hard behind your teeth and your abs cramping from the effort: "Tsss..." Stop shortly before you run out of air.

Make sure that you try to press the bell to the side as much as up; follow the groove explained earlier.



The old-fashioned graduated press works swell. Having jerked the K-bell overhead, lower it an inch or so and press it back up. Stay within the groove you would have followed if you were performing a full press. Increase the range of motion over a period of time until you work all the way down to your shoulder. Keep your reps very low, one to five.

It is easier to press the bell from the shoulder than from the chest. Clean your *girya* higher than usual so its bottom lands on top of your shoulder, rather than the forearm pressed against the chest. Be certain to time your knee dip right so you do not bruise your shoulder.



Your palm and elbow will end up facing forward and slightly out. Now press. Even though the forearm is not vertical—which makes the drill a hybrid of a press and a triceps extension—you will put up a good weight. This is because the range of motion is limited: at the bottom of the press your hand is level with your eyes rather than the clavicles.

Another variation calls for the bell to land on the back of your arm. Push your elbow back as far as possible while keeping it under the bell. What you get is a partial press behind the neck. PBNs are great for the delts, but they tend to raise hell with your neck and shoulders if a straight bar is

employed. Not with kettlebells: you do not need to jut your chin forward, to avoid getting popped on the melon with the bar—and you do not need to be forced too far back beyond your flexibility limits.



If your problem is the opposite, the bell is getting to light for you and you are not ready yet to shell out some ‘evergreens’ for a heavier one, you have just as many choices.

- The obvious one, or adding reps, is on the bottom of my list.
I have made my case for keeping your repetitions low in non-ballistic drills in *Power to the People!*
- You could compress the rest periods as much as you want while keeping your reps to five and under.
- You could slow down to a snail’s pace taking up to twenty seconds to press the weight.
- You could lower the bell slow and lift it fast.
- You could pause at the sticking point and elsewhere, as you have done when practicing negatives. The variations are endless.



A two-kettlebells press is an option—either simultaneous, or in the see saw fashion. If you press both bells at once, lean forward against the weights once they pass your eyes. You will lock out with confidence and get a greater contraction of the posterior delts. Do not overdo it though; you could wrench your shoulders.



‘Two steps forward/one step back’ is a very powerful technique for building strength and muscle mass. Use it in any of your slow lifts, not just with kettlebells, and do not forget to report your gains on the dragondoor.com discussion site.

Push the weight up two inches and go back one, up two, down one, etc. until you have reached the top. Progress in a tight, springy fashion. On the way down do the contrary: down two, up one. Breathe shallow.



Generally do just one or two reps at a shot. As an option, you may choose to use the 2-1 technique only on the way up or down. And feel free to go up and down more than once, at some spot that is difficult for you; pump it for two or three mini-reps before moving along.

The plus-two-minus-one technique builds strength so effectively because it thoroughly works through various sticking and transition points throughout the range of motion—for example, the dead zone at your eye level, where the deltoid has checked out but the triceps has not quite kicked in. The technique teaches you keep the tension on all the involved musculature for as long as possible and to ‘shift gears’ without stalling.



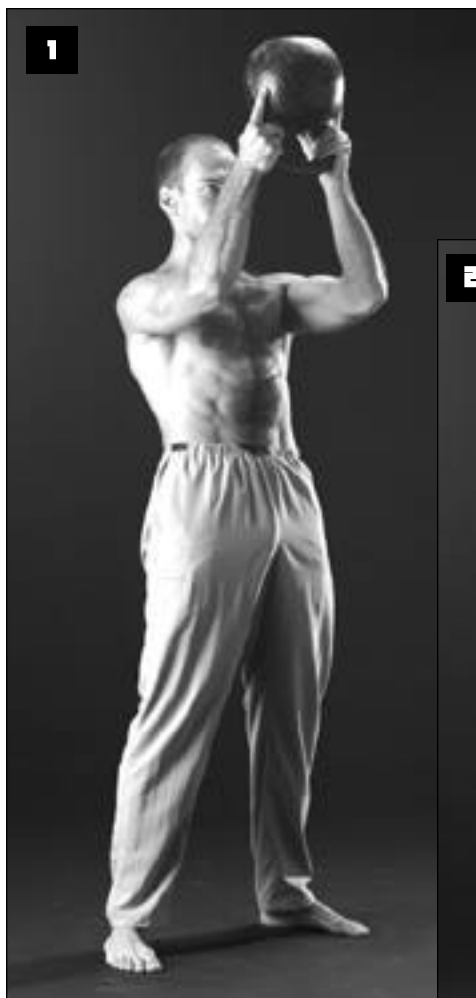
Recent scientific research may explain the plus-two-minus-one technique's exceptional ability to pack meat on your bones. Muscle tension impedes the blood flow and traps various growth factors. According to the study by Schott et. al (1995), the muscle cells' longer exposure to these substances supposedly stimulates their growth. But whatever the reasons, the technique works.

An unusual and difficult way to press is with the bell resting on your palm. This 'waiter press' will teach you a strict and perfect pressing skill and will encourage you to apply pressure to the palm in the power spot described earlier. You may support the bell by its flat bottom or its curved side.

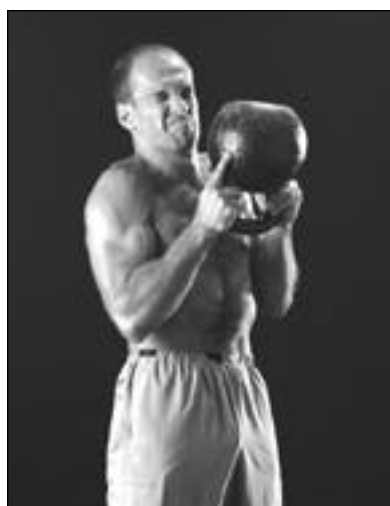
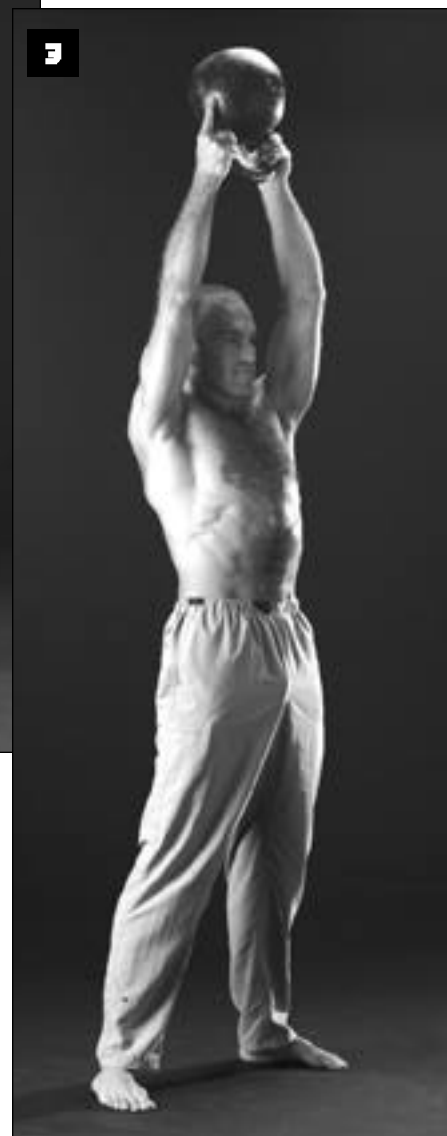


A cruel and unusual way to press is bottom up. The drill develops unreal grip and wrist strength.



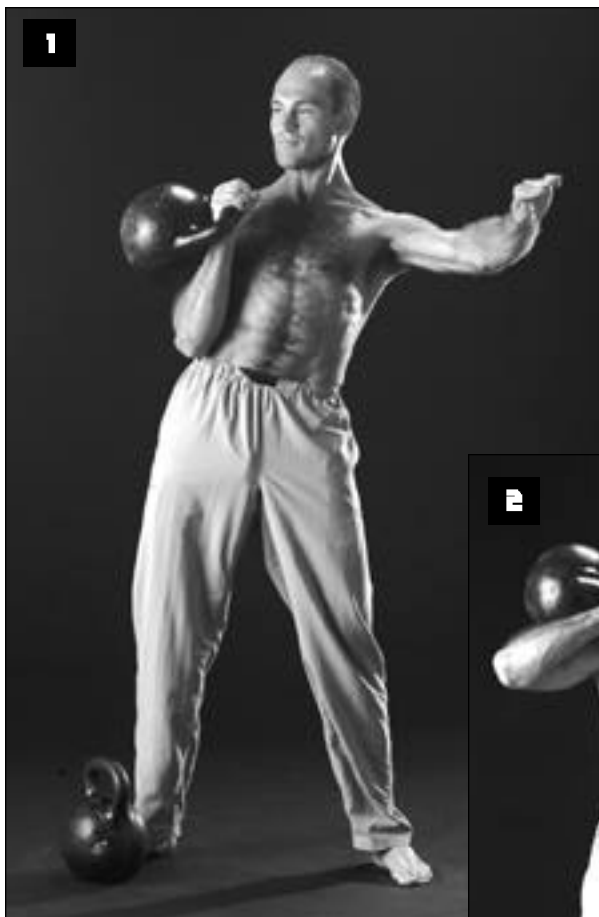


Finger and thumb pressing a bottom up K-bell with two hands is a decent exercise, one favored by the great Arthur Saxon. Keep your fingers and thumbs tight.



Keep your fingers and thumbs tight, do not hyperextend and jam them (left).





The elbow raise will strengthen your shoulders for pressing. Clean a heavy K-bell and push it up with your elbow. No, scratch that! Do not think of pushing up, rather ignore the weight and imagine that you want to push your elbow straight out. This martial arts imagery will add power to your

elbow—as the Irish saying goes—and will protect the shoulder. Needless to say, if you are pushing straight out the arm should not rise any higher than parallel to the ground. If it does, the drill becomes a poor trap exercise that hurts the shoulder.



Floor pullover and press

Not a favorite of mine, it is nevertheless a good exercise if you favor working your pecs.



Lie on the floor and bring a kettlebell from behind your head to over your chest with both arms. Keep your elbows slightly bent and 'pull from your armpits'. Your arms should be nearly parallel; flared elbows will hurt your shoulders.



Hold on to another kettlebell or some other stationary object for balance.



Lower the bell while letting it almost fall sideways; this exercise is a hybrid of a press and a fly. Keep your chest high and your pecs stretched.



Take care not to slam your elbow into the floor, control the weight all the way down. Stay tight and push back up.

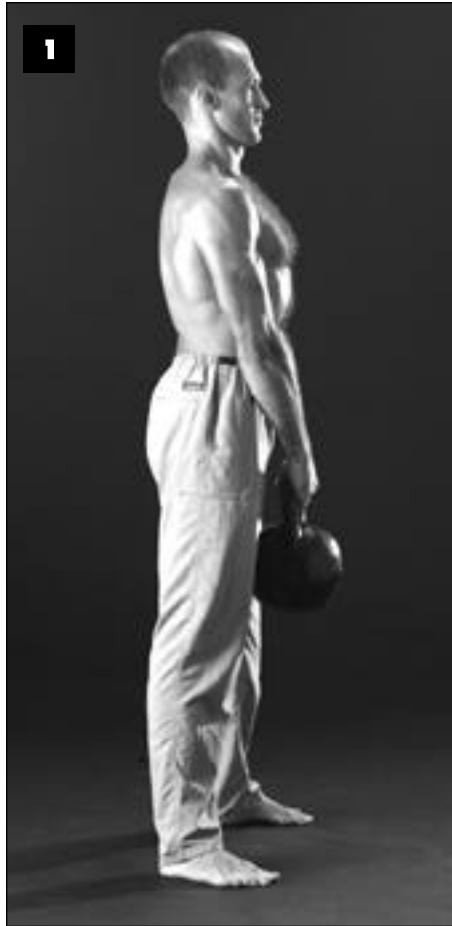


You can get an even greater range of motion, comparable to what you can get on a bench, by rolling your body to the side away from the K-bell.



Good morning stretch

The following drill, favored by Russian weightlifters, develops spectacular hamstring flexibility and strengthens the hips.



Deadlift a kettlebell with two hands. Inhale, expand your chest, and stick your butt out. Keep your weight on your heels and your knees slightly bent.



Note the wrong way to go about it. Be certain to keep your shins vertical; you should be almost falling back. If you let those knees protrude forward the exercise will not work.

As you are folding you will feel a pull right underneath your butt, or a hand's width above your knees. If you do not—read the directions from the beginning.



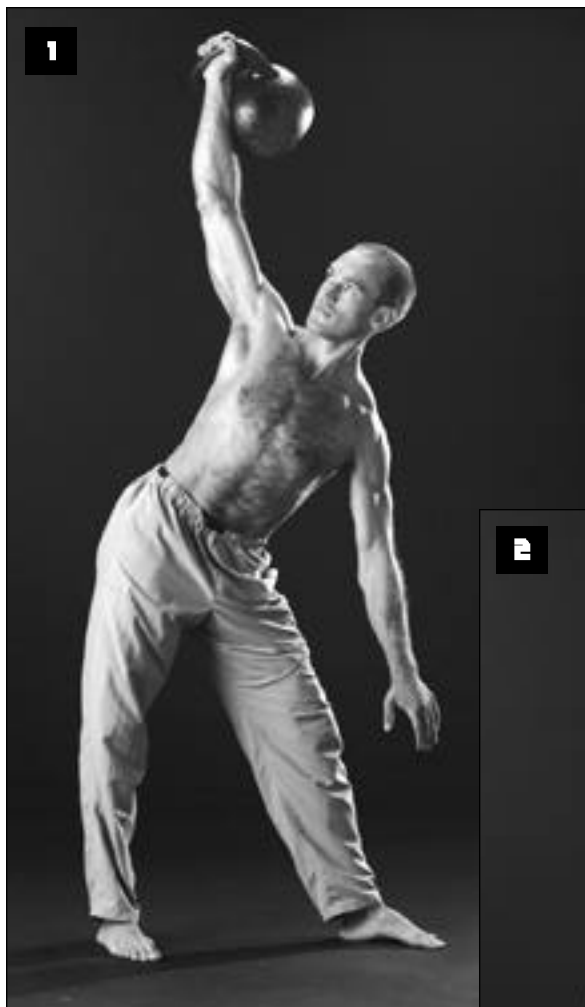
Squeeze your glutes as hard as you can and come up an inch or so. Inhale as you lift. Release the air with a sigh of relief and sink a little deeper. Your body will fold like a jackknife.



Proceed deeper and in the two steps forward, one step back fashion. Keep your chest open, your lower back arched, and your chin pointed forward throughout the set! Do not go any deeper than the level at which you can maintain this alignment. On the other hand, if you are very flexible you may want to do the drill standing on two sturdy boxes.



Windmill



Here is an unreal drill for a powerful and flexible waist, back, and hips. Elevate a kettlebell overhead any way you like and kick out your right hip to the side. Keep your right knee locked and try to maintain as much weight as possible on your right leg, throughout the stretch. The other knee may be bent; this is not yoga, Comrade! Note the position of the feet.

Keep your chest open and your eyes on the bell. Release some air and fold forward—never backward! —and to the side. The action is similar to jackknifing in the good morning stretch, but is done more to the side than to the rear.



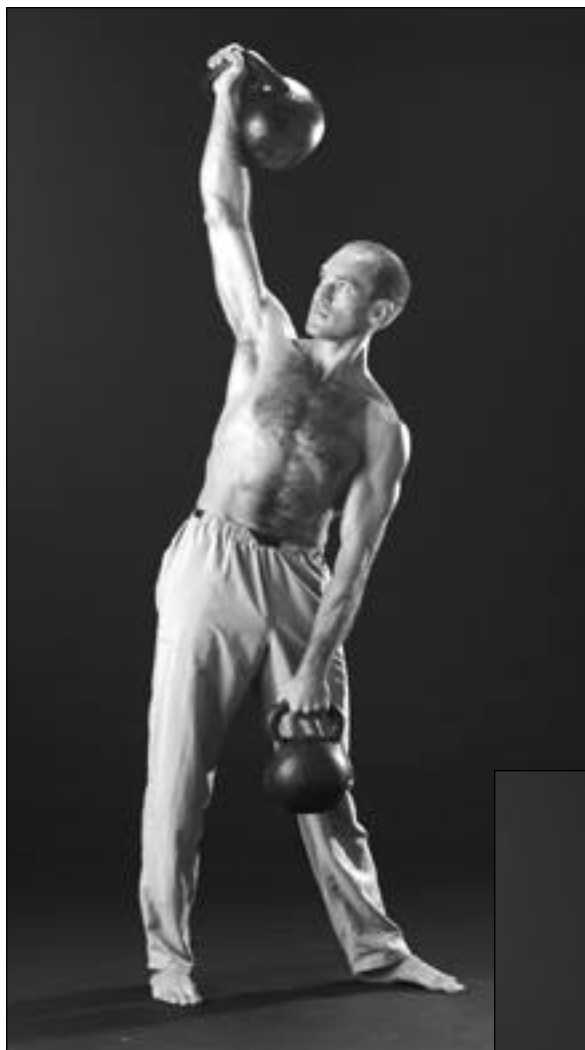


When you have reached the limit of your depth, in good form, squeeze your glutes—very important for safety and power!—and slowly, without twisting, get up, following the groove you have made on the way down. Breathe shallow. It helps to grip the ground with your toes.

Eventually work up to the point where you can place your palm on the floor.

Once you get the basic windmill down pat, place your hand behind your back. Great Canadian strong man George Jowett—this awesome exercise used to be popular on this side of the pond as well—colorfully describes the hand-behind-the-back windmill’s benefits: “You will find this exercise a dandy in more respects than one. Here is a peach for giving your entire back a workout in contraction and extension. The first time you practice it, you will feel a sensation upon your breast bone and in your shoulders akin to spreading apart.”





Another advanced windmill variation calls for two kettlebells. Put one up overhead then get down to lift the other one from between your feet. Enjoy the pain.



Side press



The side press, still regularly practiced by Russian athletes, has been unjustly forgotten in the West. An potent mix of the windmill and the military press, the side press was referred to by the father of American weightlifting Bob Hoffman in his 1946 book *Broad Shoulders* as “one of the best builders of the shoulders and upper back.”

Traditionally, the side press is performed with a shoulder wide stance and locked knees. The lifter pushes himself to the side away from the weight using his side muscles—the lats and the obliques—to assist the shoulder and the triceps. The problem with this classic technique is it makes it too easy to lean back. If you

choose to use it you must make a point of cramping your glutes and leaning forward slightly with an ab flex. Still, your back may be in danger.



The following modified side press is generally safer, but harder to master. Hoffman's how-to is hard to improve on:

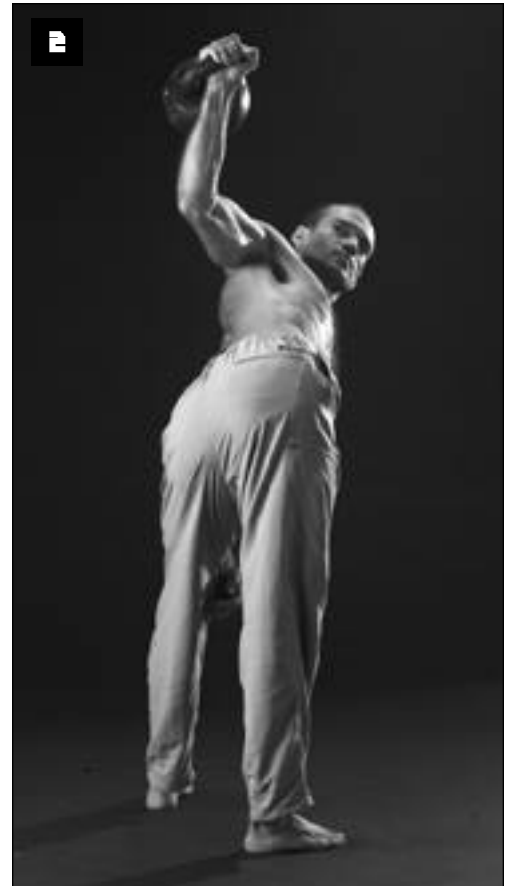
“Take the bell to the shoulder, stand with your feet about shoulder width apart, step forward slightly with the foot on the non-lifting side. Most of your weight rests on that advanced foot. Lean forward and to the side in the direction in which the foot on the non-lifting side points, assuming that you will start with the right hand, we will call that foot the left, as you lean over and forward you push up the weight with the right arm to arm's length.



Straighten your body and then lower the bell slowly. Lowering the bell slowly is important for you will obtain almost as much benefit and development from lowering as from raising. At the low point the bell should be just opposite to the shoulder and about eight inches away from it. You should deliberately harden the muscles of the upper back as the bell is lowered, so that the back muscles form a shelf or resting point for the horizontal upper arm. When you learn this movement properly, leaning toward the left foot, placing your weight upon the left foot, will cause the weight to go up almost of its own accord.”



Do not disregard the unusual recommendation to flare the lat on the way down; this long lost secret enables you to train the lats with a pressing movement. Eventually, you will notice how the lats are doing at least as much work as the delts, as you are side pressing the bell up. It's as if your upper arm is a post, erected by two opposing sets of guy wires. Ask a bodybuilder how to perform a lat spread, if you are having trouble with this technique.



Once you have learned to get the latissimus dorsi involved in the act of pressing, your poundages on all pressing exercises will suddenly jump up. That includes the bench press; experienced powerlifters always flex their lats to get the bar moving off the chest.



If you have a shoulder problem, but your doctor has okayed this exercise, you may find that the side press is the only type of a pushing movement that does not aggravate your shoulder. Again, thanks to the lat, this time for stabilizing the joint.



Bent press



Eugene Sandow, more than any other man, popularized this lift and the world has never ceased to sing the praises of this man, considered by many strength lovers to be the best built man that ever lived.

This lift, popularized by Russian strength and physique legend Eugene Sandow, is one of my favorites.

In his 1941 *The Big Chest Book* Hoffman wrote, “Arthur Saxon is a good example of concentrating on the bent press. Although he weighed but little more than 200 pounds, small as strong men go, he was one of the greatest strong men in history in all around strength. He proved that the bent press, more than any other single lift, will build great bodily strength and all around power in the human body, and skill in other lifts.

The history of weight lifting discloses the fact that the best-built men have been bent pressers. Eugene Sandow, more than any other man, popularized this lift and the world has never ceased to sing the praises of this man, considered by many strength lovers to be the best built man that ever lived.

“Bent pressing leads to proficiency in all other lifts... In bent pressing every muscle of the body is used. As I said before, it requires and develops strength in every part of the body. It teaches most of all balance, timing,

coordination, and endurance, for a considerable time elapses from the beginning to the consummation of this lift.”

The York Barbell and Strength & Health founder gave the bent press just as much praise in his other books, *Big Arms*, and *Big Shoulders*, because the bent press does not leave a single muscle group unworked.





The initial position for the bent press is identical to that of the side press with the possible exception of letting the weight ride more on your back than your side if your flexibility allows it. At no point should you lean back or you would injure your back! Lean slightly forward. Also note how the forearm supporting the weight, the kicked out hip, and the straight leg underneath form a solid column that supports the kettlebell. And do not forget to keep your whole body tight.



Keep your lat flared. It is the hardening armpit muscle that literally elevates the weight by pushing up on the flexed triceps. The lat spread is a difficult skill to master but the side press will help. And if you are still having a hard time, pumping up the lats with a couple of sets of pull-ups, right before your bent presses, should do the trick.

Lean forward and to the side in a spiral movement while keeping an eye on the bell. Imagine that you are turning away from the weight. Squeeze the bell hard, at all times. Note how the upper arm stays in constant contact with the torso, or the lat, to be exact. That is the major difference between the bent and the side presses.





“The bent press is a great developer of the latissimus. A heavy bent press creates terrific pressure and contraction of the muscles on the side of the body,” wrote Hoffman. “If a bent press is held in the proper position... the weight will “rise on the latissimus” as I like to phrase it. The triceps muscle should rest crossways upon the latissimus and as the body inclines to the side and front the latissimus muscle hardens and actually elevates the heavy weight.”

Keep folding but keep the leg under the weight straight for as long as possible. Continue screwing your body into the ground—one of the old time names for this drill is ‘the screw press’—until you are so low that your arm is straight.

Do not rely too much on brute triceps power. Think of falling away from a weight that stays suspended in space.



Slowly get up in the windmill fashion (4a) or in some semblance of an overhead squat. Remember to squeeze the cheeks. In the beginning you may help yourself by pushing with your free hand against your thigh(4b).





Arthur Saxon is a good example of concentrating on the bent press. Although he weighed but little more than 200 pounds, small as strong men go, he was one of the greatest strong men in history in all around strength...

mighty arms... Doesn't he remind you of a Gladiator? His every movement is in harmony, and wait until you see what power is behind those muscles."

"Entirely surrounded by sharp knives," as *Strength & Health* magazine reported in 1938, "he would bent press 220 pounds and while in the low position place his other hand on the floor and stretch his legs out... He could maintain this position for as long as twenty seconds!"



Arthur Saxon demonstrating a favorite show of strength.

Do not hesitate to push the bell away and drop it if things go sour! You should always practice the bent press and its variations outdoors, where property damage is not a concern. I insist.

Unfortunately some comrades will never master the bent press, mostly for lack flexibility or due to bad backs or shoulders. If, on the other hand, you somehow find the bent press not much of a challenge anymore, you could try the superhuman stunt by old timer Batta, who performed in France. "He was as handsome and as perfectly fashioned as a Greek statue," recalls Prof. Desbonnet. "He had very broad shoulders and his waist showed fine separation of the oblique muscles. His legs were well developed but most noticeable were his

Minus the drama of knives, this 'gladiator press' will make a dandy of a drill for you. Especially if you are a grappler or just a tough guy.

Another ugly evolution of the bent press is the 'two hands anyhow'. An Arthur Saxon invention that must have been inspired by too much German beer, this one is not for the faint of heart.





Having reached the lowest position of the bent press, curl another, lighter, kettlebell to your shoulder. Note how the elbow jams inside the knee to gain leverage.

Keep your eyes on the heavier kettlebell whenever you can. Slowly stand up—always contract the glutes! —and military press the second bell. Getting out of this position with two different sized weights is a bear. Consider dropping the weights if the surface allows it, or have a comrade take one bell from you.



A BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU CHAMPION'S PERSONAL KETTLEBELL PROGRAM

I had corresponded with Steve Maxwell for awhile before I met him face to face. Steve is a Senior World Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Champion, a personal trainer extraordinaire, and a true Renaissance man. I finally got to shake Steve's hand at the last Arnold Schwarzenegger's Fitness Expo. This superathlete and his son Zack assisted me at the Arnold's Training Seminar. Both had been following the *Bullet-Proof Abs* program and effortlessly knocked off evil Janda situps that had stopped a studly bodybuilder from the audience at two reps.

Steve Maxwell has a master's degree in exercise physiology and a wealth of practical experience in training and coaching. But what sets Steve apart from other degreed trainers is his innovative approach to designing his and his clients' programs. He sifts through an overwhelming amount of academic and hands-on training information and knows how to select the best techniques and organize them into the most powerful combat fitness cocktail. There are very few personal trainers I would endorse without reservations; Steve Maxwell is on top of that list. If you are looking for a trainer and are fortunate enough to live in Philadelphia give Mr. Maxwell a call at Maxercise, (215) 928-1374, or check him out on the web at www.maxercise.com.

Shortly after we became friends, Steve learned about my kettlebell past and asked many pointed questions. A few weeks later the wrestling champ welded handles to a couple of steel balls and took on his new kettlebells with a vengeance. The following is Steve's recent letter that includes a couple of powerful routines, reprinted with his gracious permission.

1/17/01

Dear Pavel,

Your training ideas are awesome and the kettlebells are a great conditioning tool for a martial artist. Below are some indoor circuit routines that I have found very useful.



Workout #1

1. Double arm swing to warm up. -x20
2. Military press (strict). -x10
3. Clean and push press. -x10
4. Cleans. -x10
5. One arm side press. -x5 (each side)
6. Overhead one arm squats. -x10
7. Lunges. -x20
8. Sumo deadlifts. -x20-50
9. Wrestler's bridge press. -x10
10. Turkish get ups. -x5 (each side)
11. Janda or Ab Pavelizer situps.
12. Chin up ladders. -alternate with a partner.

The circuit is done with no rest between exercises for one set of the above repetitions with kettlebells that weight about 23.6 kilograms or 52 pounds each. The workout is under 15.00 and I attempt to lessen the time every workout.



Zack and Steve Maxwell are ready to take on their kettlebells.

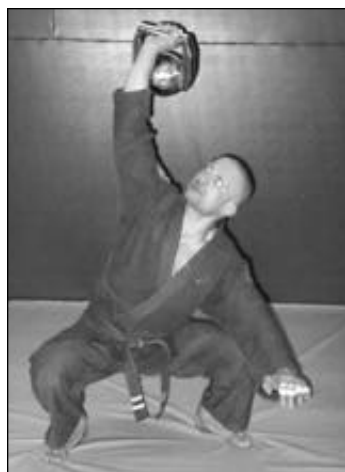




Above, Steve demonstrates the Wrestler's Bridge Press. Make sure to clear it with your doctor!



Sumo Deadlifts.



Overhead One-Arm Squats. Note how the body leans away from the kettlebell. The heels are on the floor, the knees track the feet.



The Side Press belongs in every fighter's regimen.





The Turkish Get Up! Lie on the floor and press out one kettlebell



Roll on the side and prop yourself up with your free arm. Keep your eye on the ball.



Keep your elbow locked. Your arm must remain vertical for the duration or the weight shall come crashing down when it gets heavy.



Get up from your knee. Keep your waist tight and do not let your knees buckle in.



If you think it's over, think again! Reversing the procedure is every bit as ugly. Steve Maxwell can perform the Turkish Get Up with 100 pounds. If the strongest bodybuilder you know can use half the weight, I shall be impressed.



Workout #2

1. Warm up with two arm swings.
2. One arm snatches. –100 reps (50 per side:
Lx20, Rx20, Lx15, Rx15, Lx10, Rx10, Lx5, Rx5)
3. Janda or Ab Pavelizer situps.
4. Leg raises.
5. Chinup ladder.

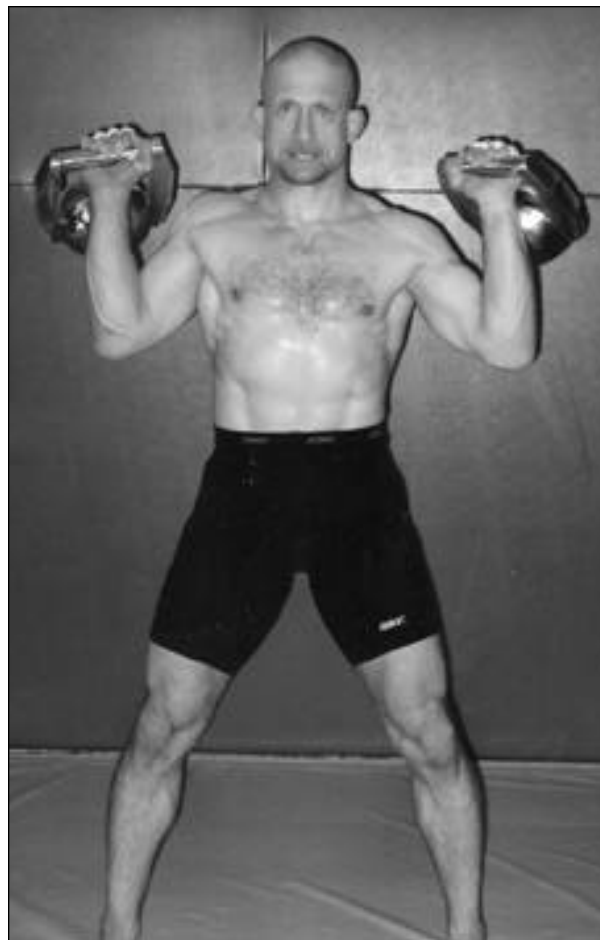
I always strive to reduce the time to do my snatches. I currently am under 7:35. This is one of the most strenuous workouts I have ever done.

When the weather is nice, I go outside and throw the kettlebells for height and distance –one handed and two handed from every angle. Throw, then sprint to the implement; throw again for time. Usually 6-10 minutes or the length of whatever tournament I am preparing for. I will repeat for three 'bouts'. I will also thread a towel inside the handle for various throws, lifts, and swings.

Good luck on your book –talk to you soon.

Your friend,

Steve Maxwell





SECTION

4

CLASSIC KETTLEBELL PROGRAMS FROM MOTHER RUSSIA

THE OFFICIAL SOVIET WEIGHTLIFTING TEXTBOOK SYSTEM OF TRAINING

Alexander Falameyev is a former USSR weightlifting record holder and a prominent scientist. He authored the chapter on in the authoritative weightlifting textbook edited by Prof. Alexey Medvedev.

Predictably, Falameyev advises to start training with 16kg, advance to 24 kg in four to six weeks, and later to dvukhpudoviks. Beginners are not supposed to train longer than 30 min per workout. Three workouts a week on non-consecutive days, preferably at the same time of the day, are the rule of thumb.

In the beginning of your career, the Russian expert advises you to limit your load to three sets per exercise in two arm exercises and three sets per arm in one-arm drills. You should select a weight that enables you to do no less than 5-6 and no more than 15-16 repetitions in a given exercise.

The scientist stresses the importance of the full range of motion. He insists on deep and smooth breathing without excessive straining and breath holding. He recommends 2 min rest intervals between the sets, filled with calm walking around.

“Repeat the one arm snatch in 3-5 sets, first with the left \ (if it is the weaker one\), and then for the same number of sets with the right arm. For some sessions, perform the complete cycle of the exercise by switching the kettlebell from hand to hand. Pay a lot of attention to developing your wrist strength. Snatch more often with the weaker arm.

“Train the press in a similar fashion. First, give an adequate load to the weaker arm (3-5 sets till substantial fatigue), then to the strong one. Once a week, perform a full cycle of the exercises \ (in 2-3 sets—as in a competition\): press the kettlebell out with one arm until total exhaustion, and then repeat the drill with the other arm, without setting the kettlebell down on the platform.”

Before tackling the competition-level, two arm/two kettlebell clean and jerk, the textbook prescribes mastering one arm C&Js with a special emphasis on the weaker arm. In line with the other KB drills, he suggests 3-5 sets per arm. When you finally C&J two bells at once, plan on 6-8 sets.



“It is best to include two different kettlebell exercises in a training session and follow them up with 2-3 barbell exercises. As the competition approaches, decrease the number and volume of barbell exercises in a session. As the sports training becomes more narrowly specialized, the bulk of the load is made up with kettlebell lifts. In the last sessions they are performed in the competition order.”

To sum up:

THE OFFICIAL SOVIET WEIGHTLIFTING TEXTBOOK GIREVOY SPORT COMPETITION TRAINING GUIDELINES

(Falameyev, 1986)

- Train three times a week on non-consecutive days, preferably at the same time of the day.
- In the beginning limit your sessions to 30 min and your load to 3 sets per exercise in two arm exercises and 3 sets per arm in one arm drills.
- Select a weight that enables you to do 5-16 repetitions in a given exercise.
- Perform your exercises through the full range of motion.
- Breathe deep and smooth without excessive straining and breath holding.
- Rest for 2 min between sets. Calmly walk around.
- Train the one arm snatches, presses, and C&Js in 3-5 sets. Complete all the sets for the weaker arm first.
- Once a week work both arms back to back without setting the kettlebell down on the platform. Perform 2-3 such competition style sets.
- Do extra snatches with the weaker arm.
- Pay a lot of attention to the development of your wrist strength.
- Before tackling the competition-level, two arm/two kettlebell C&Js, master one arm/one KB C&Js, with a special emphasis on the weaker arm.
- Train the two arm/two kettlebell C&J in 6-8 sets.
- Include two different kettlebell exercises in a training session and follow them up with 2-3 barbell exercises.
- As the competition approaches, the number of barbell exercises in a session is decreased, so is their volume.
- In the last sessions before a meet, the lifts are performed in the competition order and fashion.



Alexander Falameyev has his own unique method of teaching a greenhorn his way around a kettlebell: perform one arm/one KB lifts, but assist your working arm with your free arm. Here is how it is done for the snatch.

Take an overgrip of the kettlebell handle with your stronger—let's say right—hand. Fortify your right by taking an undergrip around it and pressing down hard with your left. Now practice swinging the bell between your legs and lifting it overhead while holding it tight.

The next step is to learn fixing the KB overhead with one arm. The left hand moves away when the right one has complete control. As you are improving, help less and less with your left and eventually let go with it completely. Study the left hand snatch in the same fashion.

In the same vein, if you cannot tackle the weight with one arm during military presses, you may press against the bottom of the kettlebell with your free hand (just don't ask me to demonstrate this maneuver though; my IQ is insufficient).



THE WEIGHTLIFTING YEARBOOK PROGRAMS

Recognized *girevoy sport* expert V. I. Voropayev proposed innovative changes in K-bell training methodology and developed unique routines. Even if you find them too complicated you might get some ideas for a schedule of your own. One of Voropayev's ideas was a new way of measuring training intensity. For the record, Russian weightlifting coaches measure intensity by averaging out the weight lifted in an exercise, workout, week, etc. (I explain this definition of intensity based on weight, in my book *Power to the People!* — a definition considered controversial from the Western viewpoint). For example, if an athlete squatted 200kgx4, 220kgx2, 240kgx1, 250kgx2/3, his coach will start by calculating all the kilograms lifted in each set:

$$\begin{aligned}200\text{kg} \times 4 &= 800\text{kg} \\ 220\text{kg} \times 2 &= 440\text{kg} \\ 240\text{kg} \times 1 &= 240\text{kg} \\ 250\text{kg} \times 2/3 &= 1,500\text{kg}\end{aligned}$$

Then he would total all the tonnage:

$$800 + 440 + 240 + 1,500 = 2,980$$

Then he would add up all the repetitions:

$$\begin{aligned}200\text{kg} \times 4, 220\text{kg} \times 2, 240\text{kg} \times 1, 250\text{kg} \times 2/3 \\ 4 + 2 + 1 + (2 \times 3) = 13\end{aligned}$$

Finally he would divide the tonnage by the reps:

$$2,980 : 13 = 229$$

Voropayev logically argued that with a fixed weight this measurement is meaningless. In his example a girevik performed the following snatch sets with a 32kg kettlebell:

$$32\text{kg} \times 60, 32\text{kg} \times 55, 32\text{kg} \times 50, 32\text{kg} \times 45, 32\text{kg} \times 40, 32\text{kg} \times 35$$

The tonnage adds up to 9,120kg and the total reps are 285.

$$9,120 : 285 = 32\text{kg}$$



No information.

Voropayev suggested defining kettlebell-lifting intensity as a percentage of the last competition results. For instance, a girevik snatched a 24kg fifty times at the last meet. The number 50 corresponds to 100%

Now he puts up the following snatch numbers in his training session:

24kgx40/2, 24kgx30/3

40 repetitions corresponds to 80% intensity ($40 : 50 = 0.8$) and 30 to 60%. Now just add the intensity values for each set and average them out:

$$\begin{aligned}80 + 80 + 60 + 60 + 60 &= 340 \\340 : 5 \text{ sets} &= 68\%\end{aligned}$$

According to Voropayev, the above approach to calculating intensity provides meaningful information about a given workout and eases the coach's job of charting out programs for sportsmen of different qualifications. If Ivan can snatch 24kg 100 times and Sergey stalls at 24kgx50, they can follow the same workout by plugging in their numbers. E.g. if the coach demanded a set with 90% intensity Ivan will knock off 90 reps and Sergey will only have to do 45 although both will be equally bushed. Voropayev insists on the importance of calculating and monitoring the training variables, something he believes should be taught to beginners from the get go.

Voropayev has also introduced tempo variation into kettlebell lifting. "Competition lifts for the (the snatch and the C&J) are usually performed with a medium tempo. This tempo is most economical and the athlete has an easier time controlling his actions. The medium tempo of lifts synchronizes with the breathing rhythm, which enables the athlete to maintain high work capacity for a longer period of time and therefore show a better result. However, training with a constant tempo causes adaptation, which slows down the sports performance growth.

Experimental data has shown that doing kettlebell exercises with an accelerated tempo facilitates the athlete's gains."

The following table was proposed as a guideline. The author points out that the values will change from individual to individual.



KETTLEBELL EXERCISES TEMPO (SEC)

(Voropayev, 1986)

	Fast	Medium	Slow
Press	2.0-2.5/27*	3.0-3.5/19	4.0-4.5/14
Alternate press	2.0-2.5/25-30	2.5-3.0/20-25	3.0-3.5/15-17
Jerk	2.0-2.5/27	3.0-3.5/19	4.0-5.0/14
Snatch	2.5-3.5/20-25	3.5-4.0/16-18	4.0-4.5/14-15
Two arm snatch or snatch pull	2.0-2.5/27	2.5-3.0/23	3.0-3.5/19
Snatch lowering the KB to the chest	2.5-3.0/23	3.0-3.5/19	3.5-4.0/16

* Time per repetition/the number of cycles per minute

The tempo would be recorded after each set with caps: **F**(ast), **M**(edium), and **S**(low). E.g. 32kgx30S, 24kgx50F. If all the sets of an exercise are performed in one tempo mark them once in the beginning, e.g. M32kgx20/3, 24kgx40.

The author mentions that the tempo may be monitored with a stopwatch but a metronome is better. A *girevik* usually gets accustomed to training with a metronome in two to three sessions. Later he will possess an inner rhythm and the metronome can be used just for control.

Voropayev complains about kettlebells coming in only three sizes. He recommends various ways to modify the kettlebells' weight, such as drilling holes in them, then filling the holes with different amounts of lead. Occasionally a top weightlifter (such as legendary Yuri Vlasov, who was heart broken when someone stole his custom made 56kg kettlebells) or a circus strongman like Valentin Dikul, would order heavier kettlebells or 'bulldogs'. Considering that these men are professional strength athletes and Voropayev is a college professor, this is an acceptable luxury for him and his students, but certainly not an option for the armed forces. Besides, I never worked with non-standard KBs during my competitive career and I never felt the need for extra KB sizes. There are more creative ways of varying the difficulty: lifts without the use of momentum, partials, etc. Still, I am listing Voropayev's exact workouts to be accurate and to stimulate your imagination.



PRE-COMPETITION WEEKLY TRAINING PLAN FOR AN BONG II HAZRYAD GIREVIN.

(Voropayey, 1986)

Training session #1

1. Alternate or 'see-saw' press

16kgx60%/2M*, 24kgx70%/2M, 24kgx70%/2F

2. Two arm snatch pull. –M24kgx40%, 32kgx50%/3

3. Snatch. –24kgx40%M, 32kgx50%/2F, 32kgx40%/2F

4. Parallel bar weighted dips. –Bodyweight + 10-15kgx100%

5. 2KBs jerk. –F24kgx50%/2, 32kgx60%, 32kgx70%/2, 32kgx50%/2.

Clean the kettlebells only once, at the beginning of the set.

6. Rope climbing. –3 times

7. Easy jog. –7min

8. Relaxation exercises. **

* *Weight x percentage of a recent PR (repetitions) / sets tempo*

** *Fast & Loose! book and video cover these exercises.*

Training session #2

1. Snatch changing arms every repetition. –

16kgx60%M, 24kgx70%/2F, 32kgx80%M, 32kgx90%F, 32kgx80%F

2. 2KBs clean. –M24kgx70%, 32kgx70%, 36kgx70%/4

3. Press. –F24kgx70%/2, 28kgx70%/2, 32kgx60%/4

4. Back raise off a pommel horse. –5-10kgx14-18 reps/4

(the weight is held behind the neck)

5. Snatch without lowering the kettlebell to the chest. –

F24kgx80%, 32kgx90%/3

6. Easy cross country run. –15 min.

7. Relaxation exercises.



Training session #3

1. Pressout from the forehead level. –M24kgx50%/2, 32kgx50%/2
2. 2KBs jerk. –24kgx70%M, 24kgx70%F, 28kgx70%M, 32kgx60%/2F
3. 2KBs deadlift off an elevation. –28-36kgx10-14 reps/5-7
4. 2KBs bench or floor press. –S24kgx80%, 28kgx80%, 32kgx80%/4
5. Cross country run. –20 min.
6. Relaxation exercises.

Training session #4

1. Snatch without lowering the kettlebell to the chest. –16kgx50%M, 24kgx60%M, 24kgx60%/2F, 32kgx60%M, 32kgx60%F
2. 2KBs jerk. –24kgx70%M, 24kgx70%F, 32kgx60%/2F, 36kgx40%/2F
3. Barbell good morning. –40-50kgx6-8 reps/4
4. Overhead barbell squat. –60kgx15 reps/2, 70kgx10 reps/3
5. Basketball. –20 min
6. Relaxation exercises.

Voropayev's training plans are designed with four training days a week in mind. You have your choice of two standard Russian schedules: Monday-Wednesday-Friday-Saturday, or, if you are tougher, Prof. Arkady Vorobyev's Monday-Tuesday-Thursday-Friday.

The optimal training effect for the development of strength endurance is only achieved in a state of pronounced fatigue. Voropayev has observed this threshold at 80% of the best result, at least when the medium tempo is used. According to this specialist, it takes a lot of repetitions to get to that threshold and these reps are not worth much in terms of training effect.

Voropayev reports that his athletes have had great success when they applied the traditional bodybuilding technique of 'drop sets' to kettlebell lifting. The idea is to do as many repetitions as possible, then reduce the weight and immediately keep going. Usually three back-to-back drop sets are performed in this fashion, e.g. 32kg, 24kg, 16kg. It was suggested that drop sets are marked with an "<", e.g. (<32kg, 24kg, 16kg).



PRE-COMPETITION WEEKLY TRAINING PLAN FOR AN 80KG RAZRYAD GIREVIH.

(Voropayey, 1986)

Training session #1

1. Snatch. –24kgx80%M, 32kgx80%S, 32kgx80%M, 32kgx80%/2S.
2. Alternate or ‘see-saw’ press. –(<28kg, 24kg, 20kg, 16kg) /3,
rest 3-4 min between series.
3. 2KBs clean. – (<32kg, 28kg, 24kg)/4
4. Parallel bar weighted dips. –Bodyweight + 10-15kgx 8-12 reps/4
5. Lower back and abdominal exercises.
6. Running with a change of pace. –1500m
7. Relaxation exercises.

Training session #2

1. Snatch. –(<36kg, 32kg), (<36kg, 32kg, 28kg)/2, (<32kg, 28kg, 24kg)/2
2. 2 KBs jerk. –24kgx80%/2, (<36kg, 32kg, 28kg)/2
3. Rope climbing. –3 sets
4. Barbell deadlift. –80kgx8/2, 100kgx5/3
5. Barbell supine (bench or floor) press. –70kgx6/2, 80kgx5/2, 90kgx4/3
6. Basketball. –20min



Training session #3

1. Two arm snatch pull. –(<32kg, 28kg)/2
2. Press. –(<28kg, 24kg, 20kg)2. Complete one series with one arm, rest, and work the other one.
3. KB juggling. –16kg, 24kg/15min
4. Snatch. –(<36kg, 32kg, 28kg, 24kg), (<28kg, 24kg, 20kg)/2
5. 2KBs supine (bench or floor) press. –S24kgx60%/2, 28kgx70%/3
6. Abdominal exercises. *
7. Cross country run. –15min
8. Relaxation exercises.

** See Bullet-Proof Abs book and Beyond Crunches video for the most effective ab exercises in the world.*

Training session #4

1. 2KBs press. –S16kgx60%/2, 24kgx60%/2
2. 2KBs jerk. –24kgx60%/2, (<32kg, 28kg, 24kg)/2
3. Snatch. –(28kg, 24kg, 20kg), (<32kg, 28kg, 24kg)/2, (28kg, 24kg, 20kg)/2
4. Barbell back squat. –50kgx30, 60kgx20/3
5. Rope climbing. –3 sets
6. Parallel bar weighted dips. –Bodyweight + 15kgx100%/4
7. Basketball. –20min
8. Relaxation exercises.

Voropayev's *gireviks* also practice lifting kettlebells to the rep max, or one's limit before failure. This approach is admittedly inferior to the ones described earlier, such as tempo variation, intelligent load juggling, etc. It is still used however, because, according to Voropayev, strength endurance training is extremely tough and employing more than one method is easier to handle psychologically.



THREE OFFICIAL ARMED *GIAEV* SPORT FOCALIS PROGRAM

Considering the time limitations of the service—you need to practice killing people and destroying things—the armed forces strength training manual bases its programs on three weekly practices.

PRE-COMPETITION WEEKLY ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL DRILL COMPLEX #1

1. Alternate press –32kgx4, 24kgx8, 16kgx12
2. Hop. The knees are slightly bent, the feet are shoulder width apart, hold one kettlebell in front of you, hanging in straight arms. –32kgx10, 24kgx20, 16kgx30
3. Spin. –32kgx4, 24kgx6, 16kgx10. Stand in front of a kettlebell with your feet a shoulder width apart. Take a hold of the K-bell with one hand, place the other hand on your thigh. Lift the kettlebell and swing it back between your legs. Drive your hips through and snatch pull the kettlebell higher than your chin. Quickly push the bell away and give it a spin with your thumb. Catch the falling kettlebell once it has made a complete turn and swing it between your legs in preparation for the next rep. Plan on dropping the weight a lot until you master this drill. Obviously, this one for the great outdoors. And make sure to perform the spin over a soft surface such as soft soil or a thick mat to prevent the breaking of the kettlebell's handle.
4. Under the leg pass. –32kgx10, 24kgx15, 16kgx25.
5. Two kettlebells bench press. –32kgx6, 24kgx8, 16kgx15. You may perform the press on the floor instead of a bench. Be certain not to slam your elbows into the floor.



PRE-COMPETITION WEEKLY ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL DRILL COMPLEX #2

1. Snatch. –32kgx8, 24kgx12, 16kgx20. Snatch the given number of reps with one arm, then immediately with the other.
2. One arm jerk. –32kgx8, 24kgx12, 16kgx20.
3. Overhead squat. –32kgx4, 24kgx8, 16kgx12. Clean and jerk or press two kettlebells overhead, then squat back as deep as your flexibility allows you to while keeping your weight on your heels. Rock forward on your toes –and you fall, hurt your knees, or both. And do not let your knees buckle in.
4. French press. –32kgx3, 24kgx6, 16kgx15. Hold a kettlebell overhead in locked arms. Lower the hanging bell behind your head as far as your flexibility allows you. Do not flare your elbows excessively and do not relax on the bottom; you could hurt your elbows.
5. Two kettlebells clean. -32kgx6, 24kgx10, 16kgx20.
6. Supine straight-arm pullover/front raise. -32kgx6, 24kgx10, 16kgx15. Lie on your back on a bench or on the floor. Pick up a kettlebell from between your legs. Hold the bell by gripping both sides of the handle with your hands facing each other. Bring the weight behind your head and back while keeping your elbows locked.



PRE-COMPETITION WEEKLY ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL DRILL COMPLEX #3

1. Two arm snatch pull to the overhead position. –32kgx10, 24kgx15, 16kgx25. Hold one kettlebell with two hands. Do not set the bell down, keep on swinging.
2. Clean. –32kgx10, 24kgx15, 16kgx20. After doing the prescribed number of repetitions with one arm immediately do the same with the other.
3. Extended snatch pull/yielding upright row. -32kgx8, 24kgx12, 16kgx25. Stand on a box a foot tall or so, the kettlebell on the floor in front of you. Squat deep, grab the bell with both hands, and explosively stand up and lift it until it is hanging in front of your locked arms overhead. Lower the bell slow. Do not put the weight back on the floor until the end of your set. Warning! This drill can be very hard on the shoulders. If you cannot do it pain free –just forget it.
4. Jerk. -32kgx6, 24kgx10, 16kgx20. Work one arm, then immediately the other.
5. Two kettlebells curl and press. –32kgx4, 24kgx8, 16kgx12. The kettlebells are in front of you and your feet are a shoulder width apart. Bend down and grab the bells with an undergrip. Straighten out while curling the bells slowly –good luck ;) –to your shoulders. Without stopping there press them overhead. Lower the bells in the reversed sequence. Unless you are my arm wrestling buddy national champ Jason Remer you will have to cheat curl the K-bells. Do not lean back if you do.
6. Stiff legged deadlift/upright row. –32kgx10, 24kgx15, 16kgx25. Stand on a box a foot tall or so, the kettlebell on the floor in front of you. Bend forward while keeping your knees straight and pick up the bell with both hands. Slowly straighten out and lift the weight overhead, then lower it back to the floor. This one is for healthy backs only

The armed forces manual encourages the use of the tonnage system favored by Russian weightlifters—calculate the total amount of weight lifted or the number of lifts with a given weight per workout. One to three sets per exercise are recommended.



Considering the fixed weight of the kettlebells, *Soldier, Be Strong!* advises increasing the difficulty by adding repetitions, performing exercises without a pre-swing—e.g. snatching straight from the floor—increasing the speed of lifting and/or performing the same set in less time.

The manual presents three complexes that are progressively higher in volume. The first routine contains 45 lifts with 32kg, the second goes up to 55, and the third one wipes you out, with 90 lifts using *dvukhpudoviks*. Lighter bells follow the same progressive pattern from complex to complex: 50, 65, 85 lifts with 24kg and 120, 130, and 135 lifts with 16kg. The manual points out how easy it is to calculate your tonnage by multiplying your weights by your reps in each exercise and then adding up the numbers in all six drills.

The armed forces manual stresses that the suggested routines obviously need to be individualized. Not everyone will be able to perform the listed numbers from the get go. If you cannot make the prescribed reps you are advised to do more sets with lower reps, e.g. 24kgx10/2 instead of 24kgx20.

“For a faster rate of improvement and better recuperation in a weekly cycle it makes sense to vary your loads,” write authors A. Burkov and V. Nikityuk. “For that reason one ought to increase the volume in one of the weekly workouts (by approximately 10%) in each set and perform the last set of each exercise to the limit and with maximal speed.”

The armed forces manual advises monitoring recovery and watching out for overtraining by keeping track of one’s heart rate. A 25-50% increase over the pre-workout numbers is acceptable right after each session but is supposed to normalize within 1-2 hours.



GROUP TRAINING WITH KETTLEBELLS—RED ARMY STYLE

Kettlebells are equally well suited for individual training in your back yard and for group training, e.g. in the military, in law enforcement academies, in a college Phys. Ed. class, on high school and college athletic teams. And not only in Russia. One of our first kettlebell orders totaled thousands of pounds; it came from a training facility for one of the federal agencies.

The armed forces manual offers clear-cut recommendations on group kettlebell training. The proposed length of a lesson—not a ‘workout’!—is 50-90min: the introductory part of 5-7min, the main part, 35-80min, and the cool-down part of 3-5min.

The purpose of the 5-7min introductory part is to “organize the trainees, perform general conditioning exercises, and to prepare the organism for more intense exertion of the main part”.

The introductory part is kicked off with a roll call and explanation of the objectives and content of the class to the personnel. The troops get mobilized for what is coming their way and do easy general exercises such as squats, forward, backward, and side bends (see *Superjoints* for a wide range of these joint mobility drills), hops, and basic kettlebell drills with light KBs. Note that there are no static stretches! The heart rate should reach 130-160 beats per minutes, at least for twenty-year old studs.

Needless to say, in military conditions even this short ‘warm-up’ is often skipped or reduced to condition the body to go into action without prep.

The 50-90min main part’s objectives are “kettlebell exercises technique practice, strength, strength endurance, and will power development”. Generally more dynamic exercises such as snatches are trained before C&Js and slow strength exercises. The heaviest loads are planned for the final third of the main part. 180-200 BPM pulse is common at this stage.



Competition kettlebell lifts' skills are also frequently practiced with light kettlebells in the main part of the session. Technique is usually practiced individually; the main workload is often done in groups. The troops are deployed in rows with two steps between soldiers. Each row is made up of trainees of similar strength levels. The PT DI demonstrates the drill and orders the number of repetitions; the whole unit performs. This setup is supposed to provide for optimal density of the lesson and easy monitoring of the load.

If kettlebell competition is not pursued less time is dedicated to the practice of snatches and C&Js. The trainees instead perform a variety of KB drills, for strength, agility, quickness, and flexibility with variable loads. The idea is to provide a less specialized, more all-around development. The workload of non-competitive kettlebell trainees is usually a lot smaller.

The cool-down part is dedicated to calming down the organism after the intense loading. Easy jogging, walking, flexibility, and relaxation exercises are practiced.



XTREME KETTLEBELL TRAINING— RUSSIAN NAVY SEAL STYLE

The toughest way to perform snatches and other explosive kettlebell drills is under water, a favorite of select Russian Naval *Spetznaz* or Navy SEAL units. Water provides pseudo-isokinetic resistance, which means that the faster you are trying to move the harder it gets. Soviet weightlifting great Vasiliy Alexeyev who pioneered underwater lifting used to roll a barbell in the river, squat down until he was totally under water, fumble for the bar, and finally snatch it!

You may vary the depth anywhere from a few inches to having your whole body submerged, with an extended arm. Depth variation creates interesting effects. For example, try standing slightly more than ankle deep in the water and do repetition snatches. The bell will brake every time it hits the water and you will have very little momentum and elastic rebound to work with. The result is great starting strength. Dead snatching a kettlebell barely submerged in the water will have a similar effect.

Do not train at a depth greater than your chin! You may black out under water when exerting yourself and holding your breath. Cracking your skull or drowning is a definite possibility.

If you select a depth anywhere between your knees and your chin you will take advantage of the powerful ‘release effect’. For a number of reasons, your muscles are reluctant to give their best during fast movements. But if the muscle is straining in a static or fairly slow exertion—and then the resistance is suddenly removed—the fibers blast into action faster than ever!

You may select a depth that encourages a burst of speed in the range of motion you want to emphasize. For example, a weightlifter who wants to develop a TNT second pull would stand knee deep in the water. Be careful with release drills and do not hyperextend your joints the moment the bell comes out of the water. This especially applies to jerks.

The following has nothing to do with water, but is another release effect application. In the *Rapid Response S.W.A.T.* tapes, a live recording of a full day PT course I taught to Texas special weapons and tactics teams, I demonstrated how to apply the release technique to pull-ups. One tactical officer is straining for a couple of seconds trying to do a pullup while his partner is holding him down. Suddenly the partner lets go and the trainee flies up, like a bat out of hell. In my unit, troopers routinely got as high up as the sternum level with the bar.



Instead of partner resistance kettlebells were frequently put to work in the Russian Special Forces. A partner hangs a couple of heavy bells on the trainee's flexed feet—or the latter steps into the bells himself if the pullup bar is low enough. The soldier strains for a few seconds, then lets the bells slip off his boots and takes off like a rocket.

Underwater kettlebell training will undoubtedly make you a better man or kill you. And yeah, don't forget to dry your bells after your submarine expedition.



APPEND

THE OFFICIAL GIREVOY SPORT RANKING SYSTEM

(Medvedev, 1986)

Kettlebell weight <u>Weight class</u>	32kg <u>MS</u>	32kg <u>KMS</u>	24kg <u>I</u>	24kg <u>II</u>	24kg <u>III</u>
60kg	16/20*	12/15	16/20	10/15	6/8
70kg	30/35	25/30	20/25	14/20	10/12
80kg	40/45	35/40	25/30	18/25	12/14
90kg	50/55	45/50	30/40	20/30	14/16
90+kg	60/65	55/60	35/45	25/35	18/20

* Snatches per arm/C&Js

Ranks Explained

- MS** –Master of Sports (national ranking)
KMS –Master of Sports Candidate (highly advanced)
I Razryad –First rank (advanced)
II Razryad –Second rank (intermediate)
III Razryad –Third rank (beginner)

Weight Classes Conversion to Pounds

50kg	110 lbs.	80kg	176 lbs.
60kg	132 lbs.	90kg	198 lbs.
70kg	154 lbs.	90+kg	198 lbs. +



GIREVOY SPORT JUNIOR RALHING SYSTEM PROJECT

(Starodubtsev, 1984)

Kettlebell weight <u>Weight class</u>	<u>16kg</u> <u>I Jun</u>	<u>16kg</u> <u>II Jun</u>	<u>16kg</u> <u>III Jun</u>
50kg	28/7	22/5	14/3
60kg	37/2	27/15	18/10
70kg	44/31	33/24	22/16
80kg	50/42	37/32	25/21
90kg	55/50	44/40	27/25

* *Snatches per arm/C&Js*

THE OFFICIAL ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL LIFTING COMPETITION RULES

(Burkov & Nikityuk, 1985)

- Competitors wear the military uniform #2 *or #3**. The competition is held on a 4x4m platform or an even surface.
- One hour on the day of the competition is allowed for the participants' weigh-in.
- The initial position for the **snatch**: stand in front of the kettlebell, with the kettlebell between the feet and slightly forward. The contestant picks up the kettlebell, swings it back between his legs (*zamak*h), and snatches the kettlebell overhead to a straight arm in one uninterrupted movement. The snatch may be performed with or without a knee dip.

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THE OFFICIAL ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL LIFTING COMPETITION RULES

(Continued from previous page)

- Having fixed the kettlebell in the top position for one second the competitor lowers it on his forearm following the judge's command. He makes the next swing back from that position without touching the floor with the kettlebell. The competitor carries on based on the judge's count.
- The competitor is allowed to place his free hand on his hip and move his feet. However he must stop any movement when fixing the weight in the top position.
- The snatch is first performed with one arm, then, without stopping or resting, with the other. One additional swing back is allowed when switching hands.
- The snatch is not registered if the competitor failed to lock out his elbow, pressed out the kettlebell to the finish, or touched the platform with his knee or free hand.
- The exercise is completed if the participant let go of the kettlebell, stopped to rest with the kettlebell hanging, left the platform, or made more than one extra swing back when switching hands.
- In the snatch, the minimal number of repetitions must be performed with both arms.
- The initial position for the **clean and jerk (C&J)** is standing in front of two kettlebells. Having cleared the kettlebells from the floor the competitor cleans them to his chest with a movement of his choice. The kettlebells are then simultaneously jerked overhead in one movement. They must be fixed overhead on locked arms for one second in the position with locked legs. Then the competitor lowers the weights to his chest and starts the next movement. Jerking the kettlebells from the shoulders*** is forbidden.

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THE OFFICIAL ARMED FORCES KETTLEBELL LIFTING COMPETITION RULES

(Continued from previous page)

- The exercise is completed if the competitor let go of one or both kettlebells, lowered it or them to the platform, or went outside the platform limits.
- The break between the snatch and the C&J must be no less than 30 min and no more than one hour.
- A referee keeps track of the legally performed repetitions. If a repetition is not counted the referee loudly announces, “No count” and calls out the number of registered repetitions.
- The referee commands to “Stop” and announces the number of properly performed lifts following a violation that warrants termination of the set or if the competitor has failed to make three attempts in a row.
- Personal placing within a weight class is determined by adding the points

***** In case of equal score the lighter competitor wins.*

- Team placing is determined by comparing the total points earned by a team. In case of equal score the team that has more first, second, etc. places wins.

** Fatigue pants and combat boots*

*** Fatigue pants and jacket, combat boots*

**** Rather than from the chest*

***** One point per snatch, five per C&J*



As with any other sport, kettlebell lifting is evolving. Some experts proposed making the competition drills for advanced, MS and KMS, lifters tougher. M. V. Starodubtsev (1984) suggested replacing one-arm/one-kettlebell power snatches with two-kettlebell/two-arm snatches, with a partial or full squat. He also proposed dropping the bells between the knees and cleaning the bells before every jerk, rather than just in the beginning. “First of all,” points out the scientist, “these exercises involve more muscle groups than the traditional ones. Second, they work the athlete’s body more symmetrically. Third, they reduce the total number of repetitions, thus reducing the possibility of palm trauma and making competitions shorter.”

Starodubtsev proposed keeping the classic lifts for lower ranked lifters, but switching hands after each rep of the snatch during the swing, in order to provide more even loading.

