

Kettlebell Technique For CrossFitters With Tom Corrigan May 13th, 2006

Why Kettlebells? They are different, fun, and decrease boredom. Used singly, they increase stability core to extremity by distributing weight unevenly and off-center. Used in pairs, they allow for greater range of motion when compared with a bar and are a little more forgiving when flexibility is an issue.

Squat A beginning deadlift. Begin with one kb centered between feet and aligned with the balls of the feet. Maintaining a lordotic arch, lower into a good squat position, weight on heels, knees outward over toes, upper body upright, and grab the handle of the bell. Stand up by driving your heels into the floor. Lower back down maintaining good position. Control the movement at all times. Pull yourself down into the squat using your hips instead of allowing gravity to do the work. Breathing is important and is easily learned during the squat. Sniff in - quick, shallow inhale- on the way down. With effort, in this case on the stand-up or extension of the ankles, knees, and hips, "puff" air out in a short, powerful, often loud burst. Tight abs provide a girdle effect in the bottom position and tight glutes at the top prevent rounding of the low back. Sightline should be straight ahead or slightly down.

Half swing A deadlift with hip snap. Identical motion to the deadlift except that the hip snap propels the bell away from the body and the kb swings outward to chest level. If you begin with the kb a bit in front of you, the natural motion when the kb is lifted from the floor will begin your backward swing. A "hike the football" motion will bring the kb behind the thighs, it should be mid-quad height. From there, the arms naturally come forward and out as you stand up. Try to establish a rhythm, metronome like. Squeeze the handle just enough to stop the kb from rotating in your hands. If enough force is generated with the half swing, it may result in a flat footed hop, but don't 'jump' to experience this.

Walking swing The half swing with a 2 steps. When the kb is momentarily weightless and 'floating' at chest height, take two small steps. Right, Left. Don't let the kb pull you forward. Try to step with the same foot first each time. The walking swing is an exercise in coordination and timing. Start with small steps, then bigger steps, then uphill, and finally up stairs. One arm swings The kb is still centered between legs. Engage the lats and lower traps to keep the kb centered during the movement (squeeze your armpit toward your waistline) The swing is hip or chest high. Maintain good squat position with the knees pressed outward as knees would make great little targets for a moving kb if they fall inward. Progression goes: 1 arm swing, switching swing (change

hands as kb floats) switching swing walking, flip or twist kb during the switching. These drills are great for eye-hand coordination.

Racking the kettlebell - the Clean. Turn the handle of the bell vertically and hold the kb with the webbing of your thumb under the front horn. The handle of the bell should cross your palm and the spot where your wrist meets your hand under your pinkie finger. Keeping your elbow in by your side, pull the kb off the floor. At chest level, roll your hand so that your palm faces the opposite shoulder and use the opposite hand to spot the kb and push it to the outside, your arms will cross. The bell should travel around your wrist and land softly, it shouldn't go over the top and slam down. The bell should be resting on your forearm, your wrist should be straight. Let go with your helping hand and the kb is now in the racked position. Practice getting to this position from the ground up and from the top down. Your fist should travel the majority of its upward path on the pronated, or palm down direction. It should turn to the 'mug of beer' position in front of your chest. In the racked position, you should be able to wiggle your fingers without any movement of the kb. It is important to be able to rack the kettlebell.

Most overhead motions begin from here and if you can rack the kettlebell then you need not be able to clean it before progressing to presses, jerks, etc.

Lawnmower pulls A fast, short, vertical pull much like starting a lawnmower (and akin to an olympic clean). It is a fast motion off the floor and the bottom of the bell will face away from you during the 'float'. The kb begins between your feet, for a more advanced drill place the kb a bit behind you. Elbow stays close to body and fist stays close to chest. Your grip on the bell should be off center toward your thumb side. From the float, push handle down, in and up to end in the racked position. Make sure the handle moves around the bell instead of the bell around the handle. Keep your body square during the entire motion, no twisting. Drills: 4 lawnmower pulls - 1 rack progressing 3-2, etc with less pulls and more cleans as you improve. A great way to get in some quality work without beating up your forearms.

Six gun drill Start with kb slightly in front of feet, hike it to begin swing, swing it to a 'quick draw' position where thumb is facing up, elbow is bent at 90° , and the forearm is horizontal. Bell will float directly in front of you. The kb twists during this drill, beginning with the palm facing down at the low end of the swing and ending with the thumb up when the kb is at its highest point. Elbows stay in close but the bell arcs up in front during this drill, unlike the lawnmower where the path of the bell is a straighter, more vertical line. A more swinging movement is better for higher reps. Like the lawnmower drill,

begin with 4 six gun pulls and 1 clean, progressing to more cleans as you improve. Front squat With 1 kb in the racked position, use a wider stance than normal. Keep elbow in and knees out so you don't hit your elbows on your knees. Other hand can be outstretched for balance if needed. If doing 2 handed drills, tuck 3rd, 4th, and 5th fingers in behind the handle so they don't get crushed!

Thrusters Keeping elbows in close (this protects the shoulder in an overhead position - arms out to the side is much harder for the shoulder to stabilize - allow the palms to face inward or toward each other in the down or squatted position. Hands will be closer together and elbows a bit wider, so that your forearms are at an angle and not vertical. Explode upward and launch the kb(s) off of your ribcage, let the momentum from your lower body carry the kb(s) upward, at the top your palms should face forward. Tuck your elbows back in on the way down, tight to your ribcage. A good tool for anterior shoulder and chest flexibility is to push your chest forward in the overhead position.

Overhead presses Hold the kb(s) with vertical forearms, elbows are tight against sides but hands are closer to ears. Palms face forward. The kb travels from tightly in front of you, out and forward, in and up to an overhead position where your arms are close to your ears. Again, wide is hard for the shoulders to stabilize and has an increased possibility of injury. The downward path is slightly out and forward and then back in close. Elbows stay out in front through the entire motion, they never go out to the side. Breathing (did you forget?) is a puff out as you begin the press upward and a sniff in on the way down. Keep your core tight so your back doesn't arch or wobble. Variations include the push-press, push-jerk, and split-jerk, both one handed and two handed.

Snatch for higher reps and quick cycles, use a swinging snatch. Start with the kb in front of you, hike it to begin the swing, do a one arm swing to forehead height. The bell should be higher than the handle and the handle should be forehead height. Learn this spot!! Breathing - sniff in at bottom of swing, puff out at forehead. Your thumb should be twisted down 45° - if using your right hand, right thumb should point towards left heel. Your thumb stays pointing downward throughout the swing. As the kb reaches forehead high and floats (you know the spot, right?) pull back with your shoulder a little, then punch and follow through upward. The punch and follow through are thumb up. Again, make sure the handle is moving around the bell, not the bell around the handle.

Tom called this the hybrid snatch as it is more of a swinging motion and is better for higher reps. The hybrid snatch can be done with a bent elbow in place of the shoulder pull. It is harder on the elbow and care should be taken

when learning and performing higher reps. An Olympic style snatch will have the kb follow a more vertical path closer to the body, much like the lawnmower pull but higher.

Tom did a great job explaining much of this in his handout. If you left the seminar without one contact me and I'll send you one or email us or Tom to get your questions answered! Tom is at kbfirerantom@yahoo.com, just put something "kettlebell" in the subject line!