

# INTERVAL TRAINING WITH KETTLEBELLS FOR COMBAT SPORTS

**BY DAVID W. MORGAN, MA, CSCS-D\*, NSCA-PT-D\***

The kettlebell is unique in that no other implement can be used for such a variety of exercises and movements. The unique demands of combat sports entail the following elements. Using kettlebells to train these elements is very effective:

- Dynamic/Isometric strength
- Anaerobic/aerobic conditioning
- Quickness and explosive power
- Flexibility/mobility
- Mental toughness!

When discussing **dynamic strength** we are talking about functional strength specific to your sport. Explosive, speed strength, a strength that can be applied in all planes of movement. Combat sports require combinations of movements in all planes, sometimes in very awkward positions. Kettlebell combination exercises are excellent for training

INTERVAL TRAINING WITH KBS FOR COMBAT SPORTS - DAVE MORGAN

1

the CNS. Isotonic muscle actions adapt to the demands put upon them. Kettlebell training also emphasizes the eccentric movements involved with deceleration of body segments. Again, catching your balance, bracing yourself from an attack and counter-movements. **Isometric strength** is often overlooked these days. If you take a close look at every athletic movement you will see isometric movements. In wrestling and grappling, the ability to control your opponent in a position that will enable you to score or force a submission depends on your ability to put constant pressure on various body segments or joints. Isometric training combined with dynamic strength enhancement are keys to success in your sport. Grip strength is the most obvious form of isometric strength in action. KB training provides a constant emphasis on grip. Research has shown that the one true predictor of grappling success is grip strength. Grip training and the combat sports literally go hand in hand.

The emphasis on the **anaerobic** energy system for combat sports is paramount. Using the principals of interval training to enhance the Type II fiber development along with explosive power movements interval training has been shown to enhance VO2 max.. The Tabata Protocol method has given scientific support for this kind of training. **Aerobic** training can inhibit strength gains if it is not cycled into the training scheme at the proper time. Developing a good aerobic base is important for enhancing the speed of recovery from the short burst activities. This could be an upcoming article! All in all the actual drilling and full go practice that goes on in your sport will enhance your aerobic conditioning. Kettlebell training uses the explosive Olympic type lifts, snatch, cleans, jerk presses etc.. These types of movements will add to the conditioning process.

Kettlebell combinations and complexes will supplement your training program. Using the **explosive** lifts and **quick** movements that you can do with the kettlebells provide a conditioning tool that is fun and skill oriented in itself. Set up the KB drills to simulate the actual sport specific movements.

**Flexibility** and **mobility** go hand in hand when training for combat sports. KB movements such as the Turkish Get Up, Windmill, Standing lateral twist movements,

various figure 8 drills and lunges in all planes can be modified to adapt to your sporting demands.

**Mental toughness** is developed in many ways. Can you complete the workout for today? Can you get back to your feet after a partner throttles you? Can you visualize yourself finishing your moves on an opponent or do you give up? Do you want to win? Training with KB allows you to pit yourself against the bells! Athletes must learn to conquer themselves and not give up when the going gets tough. Excuses are easy, hard work wins matches. One of my favorite sayings comes from Dan Gable “ The harder you work, the better you luck gets”. Enough be said!

KB helps train and maintain the elements of combat sports. Let us take a look at a sample interval program I used successfully on my wrestling squad. This program was cycled in the season to fit 2 days per week after practice. The KB interval training was an integral part of our conditioning program. It was designed to equate to a 6 minute match. The athletes tried to complete each round in less than 2 minutes. Rest periods between rounds were cycled based on the time of the season. This was the mental toughness I was talking about. Some of the athletes would fail and some would find excuses not to finish. Most of the athletes tried to complete the rounds on time and this was a great motivational tool. Combat athletes are very competitive and proud. The KB challenge was tough but those who completed it were winners. The younger and less experienced athletes were driven to succeed!

The sample that follows can be modified to fit your training movements. The idea is to simulate the sporting movements and metabolic demands of your sport.

# SAMPLE WORKOUT FOR COMBAT SPORTS

Dynamic Warm-up 5-10 min. [Drilling/wrestling/cals]

## ROUND 1

- § KB swings 2-1-1 x 5
- § One arm KB rows x 5 L-R
- § One arm push press x5 L-R
- § One arm elbow flexors [bottom up curls] x 5 L-R
- § Front squats x 5
- § One arm snatch x 5 L-R
- § Rotating lunges x 6 [forward or backward]

## REST

Early season-1 to 2 min. Mid-season- 45 sec. Pre-tournament- 30 sec.

## ROUND 2

- § One arm high pulls x 5 L-R
- § One arm clean and jerk x 5 L-R
- § KB Squat jumps x 5-10
- § One leg KB deadlifts x 5 L-R
- § Standing lateral twists x 10
- § One arm KB pushups x 5 L-R
- § Shoulder bridge twists x10
- § Elevated Russian twists x 10

## REST

## ROUND 3

- § Repeat **ROUND 1**

## WARM DOWN AND STRETCHING 5-10 MIN.

[Use bands if you have them]

Perform this routine 2-3 times per week.

Ways to vary your training routine:

- Increase the weight of the KB
- Change the repetition scheme Light days go higher reps [10-20] with lighter [50%] lighter weighted KB Medium days go [5-10] reps 75%-80]
- Increase or decrease rest intervals
- Substitute KB movements as your skill level improves
- Work lower body and torso only or upper body and torso only
- Combine push and pull movements for a KB complex
- Use two KB's

Training with kettlebells is a great compliment to wrestling, MMA and weight training. Training with kettlebells will add to your strength, power, power-endurance and mobility without adding extra bulk to your body weight. Please feel free to comment on my article.

## DAVE MORGAN

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON KETTLEBELL TRAINING AND PRODUCTS  
VISIT MY WEBSITE**

**[WWW.ENHANCEDFP.COM](http://WWW.ENHANCEDFP.COM)**

**E-MAIL: [DMORGAN@ENHANCEDFP.COM](mailto:DMORGAN@ENHANCEDFP.COM)**

*Dave Morgan has coached wrestling for 36 yrs., at one of the most successful public high school programs in Ohio. He has coached football, track and field and cross-country. He also was a nationally ranked Masters track and field competitor.*

## REFERENCES

Antmann, John; Cotton, Adam.” Strength and Conditioning for Judo”. NSCA Journal Vol. 27, No. 2 pp. 26-31. April 2005.

Kramer, William; Vescovi, Jason D; Dixon, Patrick. “ The Physiological Basis of Wrestling: Implications for Conditioning Programs”. NSCA Journal Vol. 26, pp. 10-15, April 2004.

Kurz, Thomas. Science of Sports Training: How to Plan and Control Training for Peak Performance. Stadion Publishing Co.. 2001.

Lansky, Richard C.; ‘Wrestling and the Olympic Style Lifts: In Season Maintenance of Power and Anaerobic Endurance’. NSCA Journal Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 21-27, June 2004.

Muriastis, Zsolt; “Special Considerations for Designing Wrestling-Specific Resistance Training Programs”. NSCA Journal Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 46-50, June 2004.

Santoro, Pat,; Koch, Tom. “A Strong Hold”. Training and Conditioning. Vol. XIII, No. 6, pp. 41-44, Sept. 2003.