

# COMBAT HARD

*SURVIVING THE MOMENT OF IMPACT*

*RICK WALKER, CSCS*

It is the middle of your graveyard shift as a police officer. You spot a car driving erratically and you pull it over to investigate. Something just isn't right, so you ask the driver to exit his vehicle. The driver is very nervous, his eyes are scanning the surroundings and his speech is fast and choppy. You ask the man if he has any drugs or weapons on him or in his car. He says no, but you can sense that he is lying. You ask if you can search his car, but he argues with you, telling you there is no reason to search it. You again ask the man for permission, and that is when it happens. He lunges at you, immediately grasping at your side arm, and wrestling you to the cold, dark pavement. This is your worst nightmare beginning to unfold. It is just you, him, and the dark night...

What you have done up to that point will make the difference between living and dying. Between successfully apprehending a violent criminal or becoming an all too real statistic. Did you spend your days after the academy eating McDonalds and polishing off 6-packs after work? Did you practice daily the skills to keep your ass alive? Did you keep yourself in razor sharp conditioning?

This article isn't about combat. I can't teach you how to defend yourself. This article is about becoming **Combat Hard**. **Combat Hard** is having the physical attributes that allow you to not only survive a violent situation, but to thrive in it. Coming out on top is

not an option-it is a **REQUIREMENT**. Unfortunately, many people entrusted with the safety and welfare of others wear blinders when it comes to their own physical conditioning. We have all seen the fat cop or prison guard with his belly “dun-lapping” over his belt. By allowing themselves to get out of shape, they are putting not only themselves, but those who rely on them, in serious jeopardy. You owe it to your co-workers, your family, and those you protect and serve to be a machine.

## **COMBAT CONDITIONING: 4-5 DAYS A WEEK**

When someone is fighting with nothing to lose, a strange thing happens. Even the smallest of people turn into Hulks. Adrenaline flows, the body turns off the pain sensors, and all hell breaks loose. If you think you can just use some fancy move the Academy taught you, you better think again. When it kicks off, it is **YARD OUT**, and you had better be ready, or you are going to pay the price.

Think of the caged animal. Take the small domesticated house cat for example. The house cat is a small animal. The last thing it wants to do is attack you. However, corner one, give it no where to go but at you, and see what happens. That little 5-pound house cat is going to make you wish you never, ever did that. It will tear you to shreds. A suspect who has decided to fight is much the same. They have survival in mind, and they will stop at nothing, even if it means killing you.

Unfortunately, something always seems to kick off when you are all alone. You may have to roll with a frenzied inmate or a fleeing suspect for a number of minutes before back up arrives. This can either be to your advantage, or leave you broken on the floor.

I truly believe conditioning is 70% of the equation when it comes to combat. You can as strong as a bull moose, but if you gas out after 30 seconds, you are going to be scraping yourself off the floor. You have to have the ability to grapple, defend, and if necessary, **ATTACK** explosively for long periods of time. This combat is not the combat you see on TV. This isn't a fight in the ring where you may get a chance for a breather. This is life or death and this won't end until someone is apprehended, knocked out, or killed. Therefore, I firmly **DO NOT** believe the training is the same. Ring fights are controlled fights, street fights are not. You must learn how to use your entire body as a weapon, gouging eyes, groin shots, throat strikes, etc. Things that will stop a situation immediately on the street but should never be used in the ring.

By conditioning, I don't simply mean road work. Yes, distance training serves a purpose. It allows you to increase your aerobic capacity, trains your cardiovascular system to be more efficient which will, of course, help your conditioning. However, to be **Combat Hard**, you need to do much more than just running a couple miles every other day. You need to raise your anaerobic capacity. Simply stated: You need to be able to go **BALLS OUT** for 5+ minutes without gassing! This is much harder than just going out and jogging 3 miles.

## Combat

Let's start out with the best conditioning for combat: COMBAT! The best way to train the body and mind for combat is to simply fight. Get a training partner of equal or greater strength, roll out the mats, and go 3-5 minute rounds. None of this take it easy stuff either! Of course, you don't want to knock your training partner out, but you can grapple and throw each other for 3-5 minutes and get one heck of a workout. Practice getting out of mounts, this is especially important because you DO NOT want a suspect on top. This is also "sports specific" workout. It trains you for the situation, and trains you to THINK FAST! Don't just go through the motions! Set a timer for 3-5 minutes and go at it full speed. What good are all those fancy moves they teach you if you only practice them half speed? Really attack one another and get a feel for not only fighting, but defending yourself from strikes and holds.

## Bag Work

I love the heavy bag! I think it is the next best thing to actually grappling with a live suspect. The best part about the heavy bag is it allows you to train hand speed, attacks, and coordination without being hit back. Hone those skills on the heavy bag, ingrain them on the mat, and survive on the street or on the block.

I like to go 3 minute rounds with 1 minute rests. These rounds aren't just slapping at the bag now and then. It should be 3 minutes of hard, precise strikes with the fists, elbows, kicks, and knees. Also, don't stand in one place, dance with the bag. Move around with it; avoid it when it comes towards you. Stay light on your feet! Practice combinations and attacks. One of my favorite things to do with the bag is to practice combination strikes then a shoot attack. I might throw a jab, cross, body shot-then shoot in on the bag for the take down. The most important thing in **Combat** is to get that suspect on the ground quickly, and then do what needs to be done to end the situation.

Train up to 10-3 minute rounds and you will be amazed at how much your conditioning will have improved!

## Sled Work

The sled is another great piece of equipment that every one needs. I love training the sled because it is all concentric work. There is no eccentric movement, and therefore, you don't get that next day muscle soreness that you may get from other methods. I truly believe you can train the sled in one form or another 7 days a week with no detrimental effects.

There are tons of ways to utilize the sled. One popular way is to load it to 100 or so pounds and do explosive steps for a prescribed distance, such as 160 feet, 20 seconds rest, 160 feet. Repeat for 10-20 sets. Another way to use the sled is to do sprints with it. Use

a moderate load of no more than 30-40 pounds, strap up, and do 30-50 yard sprints with minimal rest in between. Be sure to do this on an even surface because the sled can be very hard on the joints on uneven ground. You can also load the sled up extremely heavy and increase your power and strength off the start. Pull hard for 3-5 yards with a very heavy load, then break loose from the sled and spring 30 yards without it. I find this to be extremely good for training that attack into someone. It will make that initial explosion into a suspect like a linebacker taking out a running back. You can also train the sled with a backwards pull to train opposite muscles. Get your sled from [www.EliteFTS.com](http://www.EliteFTS.com).

## **Sprints**

These are self explanatory. If you have ever played a team sport, you have had to train sprints at one time or another. Sprints can be hard on the body, so make sure you are warmed up sufficiently, and stretch out accordingly. Most injuries in the sprint are to the hamstrings, so make sure you are ready before you take to the track.

I like to run intervals to make the sprints more specific to combat. I will go to the track at the high school and start jogging. When I feel sufficiently ready physically and mentally, I will hit a 100 meter all out sprint. At the end of the 100 meters, I keep jogging. After about 200 meters of jogging, I will hit another 100 meter spring. Continue as long as you can. Set a goal of 10 or more sprints. This is painful as you hit your anaerobic threshold quickly. Breathe and work on suppressing that ‘I must quit!’ voice in your head.

Another way to train the sprints is to throw in a little body weight training. Sprint 50 meters, then hit 20 push-ups. Sprint 50 meters then do 10 pull-ups. Sprint 50 meters then do 20 squat thrusts. Again, very high in intensity which means your conditioning will rise quickly. Train these no more than 2-3 times a week max.

Another great sprint method is to spring hills. Find a medium distance hill that is very steep and sprint to the top of it. Job back down for recovery, and when you hit the bottom of the hill, turn around and hit it again. 10+ of these bad boys will have you enjoying breakfast twice.

## **Up-Downs**

If you played football, you did up downs. Remember the August heat bearing down on you as you chopped your feet in place and hit the ground every time the coach blew his whistle? You hated them, but they made you strong. The same applies here, minus the football gear. Set a timer to go off every 7-10 seconds, chop your feet in place, and when the timer goes off, hit the ground and recover back to chopping your feet. John Wood, <http://www.functionallhandstrength.com/>, recommended doing these for up to 15 minutes straight. He once told me if I could do up-downs for 15 minutes, I would be in the best shape of my life!

## **Plyometrics**

These not only increase conditioning, but they increase your speed and power as well. They can have you moving quicker, hitting harder, and lasting longer in just a matter of months. I am not going to get into individual plyometrics here, so do yourself a favor and get some good reading material on the subject. What I will say is make sure your body is ready both strength wise and flexibility wise before diving into plyometrics.

## **Isometric Training**

This could go in either the conditioning portion of this article or the strength training part. I chose to put it here because I believe it is part of the conditioning circle. Very simply, isometrics train your body to grab on and not let go. What good is it to put a suspect into a choke, or an arm or leg lock, if you can't hold on long enough to knock him out or apply restraints? If you get a suspect down, and have him restrained, nothing could be worse then to run out of gas and allow him to break free and fight again. Ever watch UFC? If a fighter gets his man into a choke, 1 of 2 things happens. He either chokes him out for the win, or he gasses and the opponent gets out and the fight continues. This is not an option on the street. If you get your suspect into a choke-you had better finish the job, or at least hold on until restraints can be applied. I know there are purists out there that say you can't choke a suspect or an inmate. I beg to differ with you. If I am attacked by an inmate, and I have the opportunity to get him into a choke, you can be damn sure I am turning him purple.

I like to train isometrics with the heavy bag. I put it in a choke type position, and then apply pressure for 10-20 seconds. You can also train isometrics with body weight movements such as pull-ups, or with the basic lifts like squats, bench presses, or overhead presses.

Some people do not think isometric training is needed for combat because, for instance, the choke is usually quick. It doesn't take long to choke someone out. However, you use isometrics when resisting their attacks, locking up, and restraining, so isometrics are extremely important in my opinion.

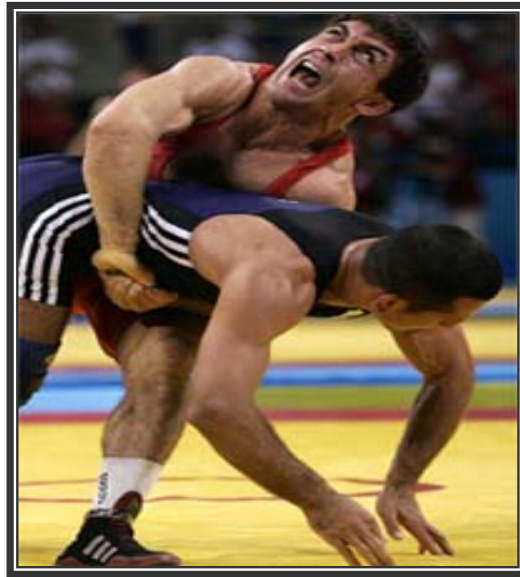
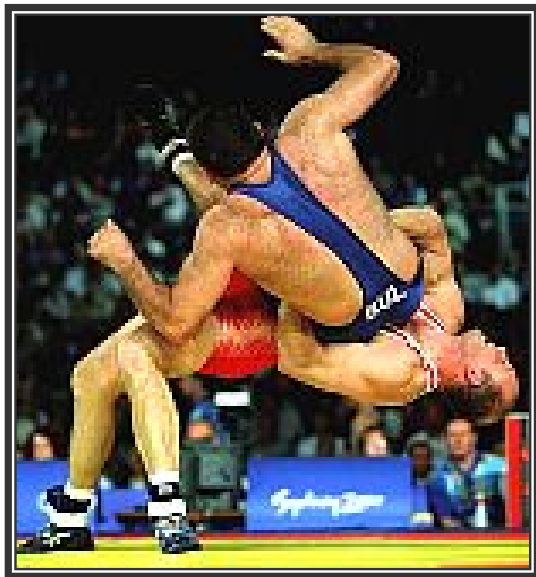
## **COMBAT STRENGTH TRAINING: 2 DAYS A WEEK**

There are some who will disagree with this part of the article till the cows come home. Some people believe that ALL strength training is functional, and skills should be learned on the mat/field-not in the weight room. I accept that as your personal belief, but I disagree with you. If you are someone who thinks weight training is weight training, then I challenge you to do some of the exercises I list in this part of the article with decent weights. There is a huge difference between doing a squat with a perfectly balanced bar on your back, and doing a squat with a keg full of water on one shoulder.

Functional strength DOES exist and CAN be trained to improve your ability to survive and thrive in combat.

## The Core

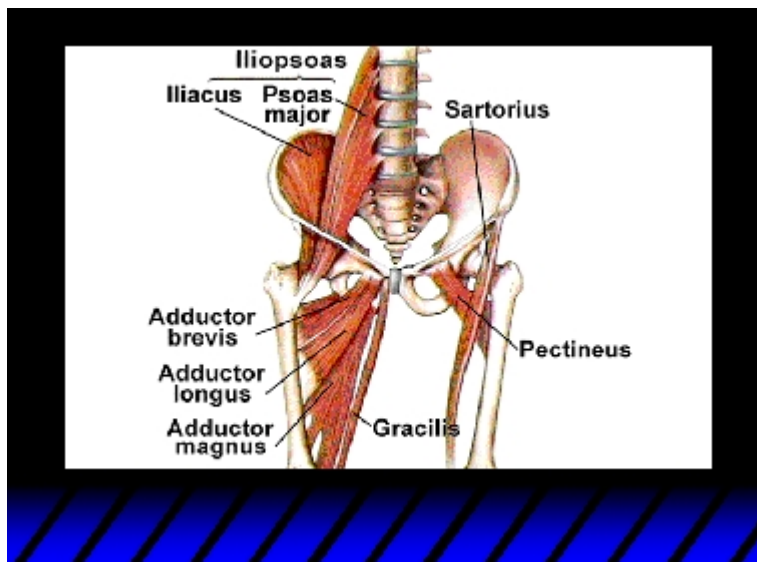
If I were to rank the muscles of the body that work during combat, I would start with the core. If your core is strong, you can do some amazing things strength wise. Never, ever underestimate the ability to grab, lift, and slam a suspect. These combinations of movements alone could end a situation as quickly as it started.



**THINK YOU ARE DOING THIS WITH A WEAK CORE? THINK AGAIN!**

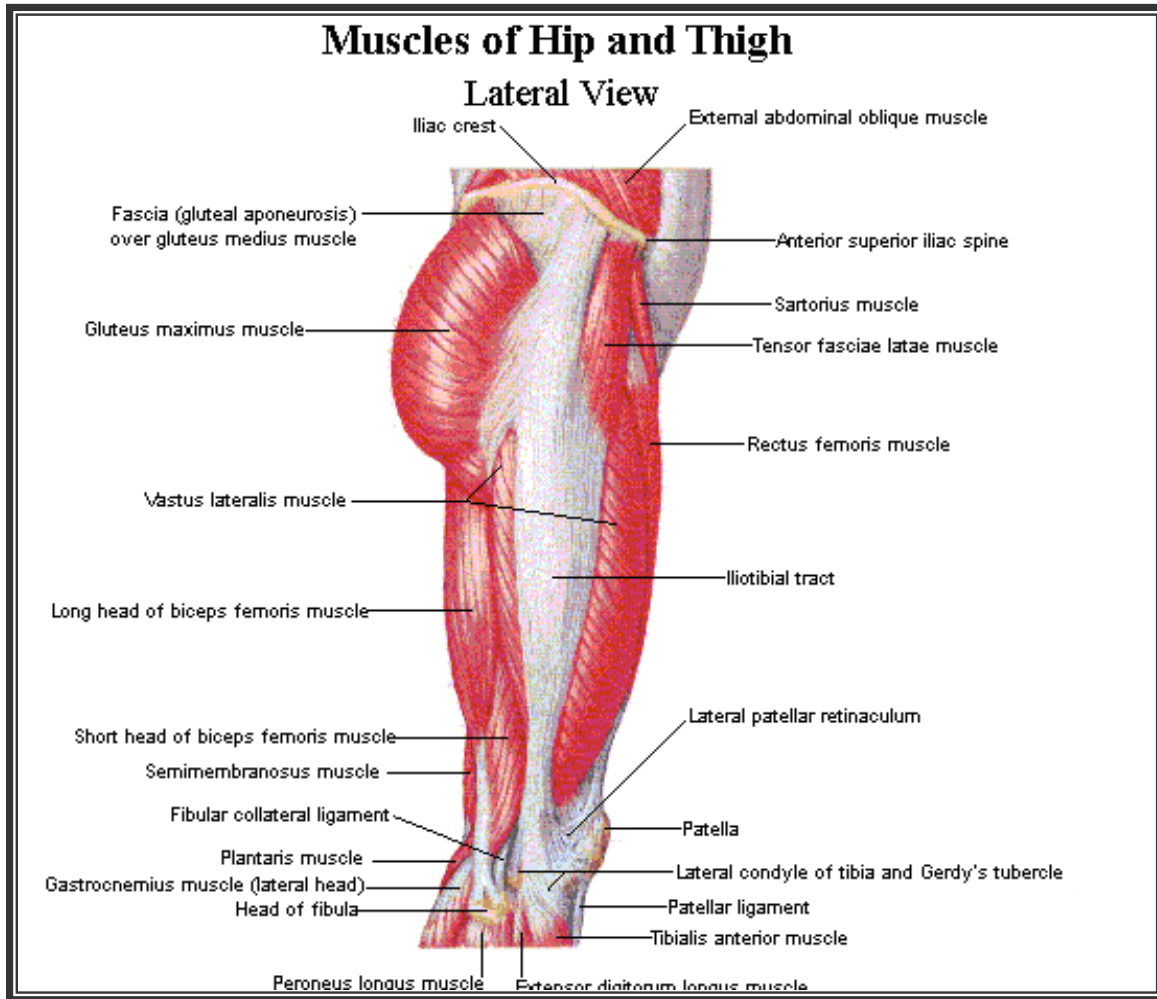
**HAVING THE STRENGTH, POWER AND STAMINA TO DO THIS TO A PUNK ON THE STREET WILL MAKE YOUR NIGHT EASIER.**

The core starts with the **hips**:



Think about how important the hips are. They provide the power for nearly every movement in the body - punches, kicks, throws, etc. Everything generates from having powerful hips. Why do you think in sports such as basketball you are told to watch the man's hips? Hips won't lie, they initiate movement.

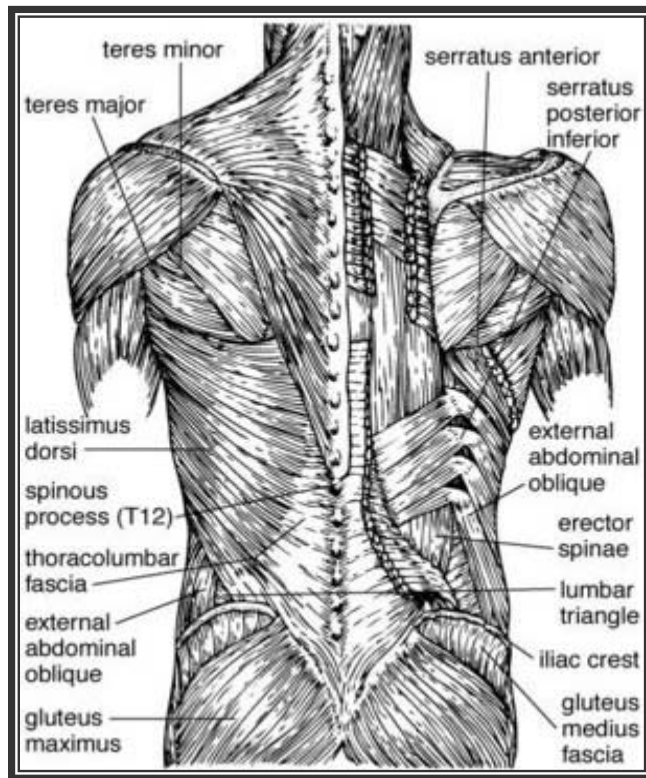
Next are the muscles in the front and back of the leg from about mid thigh up.



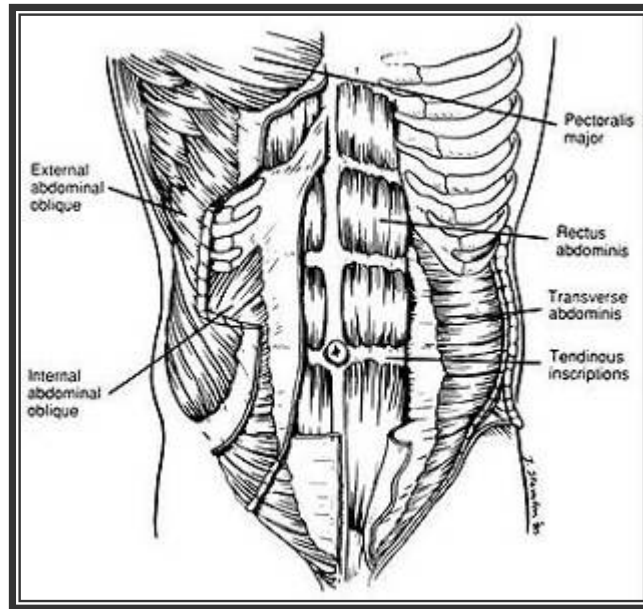
Next up, the muscles of the **lower back**.

How important are the back muscles in a combat situation? Just find a friend with a back problem and get some mat time with him. People with back trouble can often times not even get out of bed, let alone fight! You have to keep this region healthy or you will pay the price come the moment of impact.





Finally, we have the very important muscles of the front of the body, **the abdominals**.



These muscle groups should receive the most training time in order to prepare you for the fight of your life. Of course, you don't want to neglect the arms, upper back, shoulders, chest, etc. You are only as strong as your weakest link! However, you can have the biggest arms in the world and the strongest chest, but if your core is weak, you are going to get tossed around like a rag doll!

I recommend you do all of your strength training without the use of supportive equipment. That means no belts, no knee sleeves or wraps, no wrist wraps, no straps, no



tacky, no chalk. The reason for this is simple: when all hell breaks loose, you won't have lifting aids to rely on. So, why use them in the gym?

With that, let's start right off with my favorite little training tool.

## **KEG CONDITIONING**

Aptly named by Jedd and Smitty of the Diesel Crew and for good reasons! The keg (and sandbag) strengthen and condition you better than any other implement(s). It is the perfect training tool and you can get a complete workout with just a few kegs of varying weights.

One of the basic things you can do with the keg is simply shoulder it, and then start walking for distance. This will work the conditioning as well as fry the core. The keg will want to fold you over, so your abs and back will work overtime to keep you upright. Make sure to work both sides equally.

## **Keg Clean and Press**

Another basic movement that is simple to do, but the results are awesome. Take a keg full of water, sand, or what ever. Grasp it by the chins, and clean that heavy bastard up to your chest. Just like a clean with a bar, except much harder.





CLEAN AND PRESSING A WATER-FILLED KEG.

# Keg Complexes

Keg complexes are a series of movements done with the keg without setting it down. These can incorporate squatting the keg, shouldering it, twisting with it, bear hugging it, throwing it, etc.



**KEG SQUAT AND TWIST.**  
TWIST BACK AND FORTH A FEW TIMES, THEN SQUAT THE KEG BACK DOWN TO THE GROUND AND REPEAT. BE VERY EXPLOSIVE.

The above keg movement those muscles involved in tossing people!



**START IN THIS POSITION, WITH THE KEG LAPPED HORIZONTALLY.**  
SQUAT UP FAST AND THROW THE HIPS FORWARD, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY POPPING THE KEG ONTO ONE SHOULDER. SQUAT DOWN WITH THE KEG ON YOUR SHOULDER, THEN STAND UP, RETURN THE KEG TO THE FRONT OF THE BODY AS SEEN IN THE FIRST PHOTO, AND START OVER AGAIN!



## POWER MOVEMENTS

Speed kills, power rules. If you are quick and powerful, there won't be much a suspect can do when you latch on to them. I truly believe the statement, "Train slow to be slow." In a fighting situation, slow is the last thing you want to be. There are tons of ways to increase power. Many people use the Olympic lifts, some rely on plyometrics, and others simply do the basic lifts with lighter weight but do them quick.

I like to use single arm movements for power development. I think they are not only much harder, but they force you to contract more muscles throughout the body in order to be successful with the lift. The two movements I really enjoy are the Clean and Jerk with 1-Arm and the Snatch with 1-Arm. You can use dumbbells for these movements if you are just starting out, but I prefer to use barbells. Again, maximum muscle recruitment is my goal.

### 1-Arm Clean and Jerk

Have a loaded barbell in front of you like you are preparing to deadlift. Grasp it with 1-hand in the center of the bar, and then in one powerful movement, pop the bar up to your shoulder, squeeze the bar and drive it overhead.



This can take a lot of practice before you get it down. The long bar is hard to balance, and it can get out of hand quickly. I recommend starting with just the bar, period. Next, you simply press the bar overhead. If the weight is light, you can use a strict press. Once you start getting heavy, use legs to get the weight overhead. Notice the body lean, this puts enormous amount of stress on your obliques. You can do these for max singles, or go for reps to get some conditioning in.

## 1-Arm Snatch

This movement starts the same as the clean, bar on the ground in front of you grasped in 1-hand. However, you need to be very explosive with this movement in order to get the bar overhead in 1 pull.



1. Starting the pull. Deadlift stance, Hips low-EXPLODE!
2. Rip the bar up, with your arm straight (like a rope) and impart momentum into the bar.
3. As the bar travels upward, dip and push yourself under and lock your arm.
4. Control the bar down
5. Repeat.

Keep the arm straight as long as possible through out the first pull. As you near the peak of the pull, you let the momentum of your upward movement force the bar upwards along your body as your elbow bends. Finish by jamming the bar to the top and pressing through. Very hard, but very effective.



# Hang Cleans

Hang cleans are an effective 2-Arm movement to build explosiveness. Again, another movement that may take some time to learn, but they are worth it.

Pictures say 1000 words.



GOT IT?

# Tire Flip

I added this exercise in this section because I believe it builds functional power, as well as strength. This is an excellent exercise in training the body to hit someone head on and control them after impact. Be as explosive as you can! I recommend a solid tire, but not too heavy. Too heavy a tire will have you moving slow, and slow is bad.

Start by jamming into the tire like you would a football dummy sled or you are tackling someone. You are not trying to deadlift the tire, but rather push straight into it, which causes it to bite the ground and rise up.



1. Jam into the tire straight on.
2. As the tire lifts, thrust your hips forward and bring your leg hard into the tire so your knee lifts it upright.
3. Finish by popping your hands over and pushing the tire violently to stand it up.

# The “Grappler” or “Landmine”

Purchase from:

EliteFTS

<http://www.flexcart.com/members/elitefts/default.asp?m=PD&cid=114&pid=888>

or

Sorinex

[www.Sorinex.com](http://www.Sorinex.com)

As you can see, this little gem is expensive, but it is worth its weight in gold for fighters. If you don't have the cash, you can mimic a lot of the movements by simply placing a bar into the corner of the gym or power cage.

With this set-up you can do a ton of movements. My good friends at Diesel Crew covered this well with their “[Non-Conventional Training Part 1](#)” article and their 1-Arm Landmine Video – [Click here](#). I will just put up a few movements here so you can get an idea of how well this simple set-up works.

## 1-Arm Landmines

You can do a lot of 1-Arm work with this set-up which will tax the core tremendously. Throwers will use these movements to increase explosiveness and “pop” with the implement they are throwing. It strengthens your rotational strength and stability. Do you think that is important in a combat situation?





Thrust your hips forward as you rotate explosively. Pop the bar to full lockout, and then return it to the start position. Experiment with weight, but don't try to go too heavy. This exercise is for power development.

## **2-Arm Landmines**

Personally, I prefer to use the Landmine set-up with 2-arms. I think this develops great hip explosion and power in the upper body. I don't want to stand and go toe to toe with an inmate, I want to grab them, be able to control them, get them to the ground, and secure them until handcuffs arrive. Trying to straight up fight a suspect is a recipe for disaster in my opinion. It is a lot harder for that suspect to land a knock out blow when he is on the ground!

## **Landmine Presses**



Start low, focus on using leg and hip drive, gripping the plates tight, and carrying that leg and hip drive into the upper body to lock out the weight.

## **The Shovel Lift / Plow Lift**

The guys at Diesel Crew did a good job really bringing this lift to the masses. They read about it in IronMind's publication, MILO© and then did a video series on it. At first look, you might think this lift is just a recipe for injury, but before you judge it, give it an honest try. Concentrate on form and really use the muscles of the hips, abs, and back to move the bar. If there is any movement that can simulate the tossing of a suspect, this is it. I just can't say enough about how important this movement is, and how brutally strong and powerful it can make you if you see it through.



This is the starting position. My right hand should be closer to the collar than it is in the photo. The idea is to use the least amount of bar as possible which, of course, will make the movement harder. The bar rests on your hip, which is the pivot point for the bar. What will make the bar move is the simultaneous hip thrust forward and the back arm pushing downward, all the while leaning back into the bar. Some people actually almost lay down when they do this. Try to pop that bar straight up into the air. This will work the abs as well! Weight can be loaded on the end of the bar, but I recommend starting light and getting the movement perfect before getting crazy with weight. Check out Diesel Crew's Plowlift video – [Click here](#).

## **Abdominal Work**

Just about everyone knows how to train their abdominals. Most people will do crunches, sit-ups, or decline sit-ups. I am going to introduce you to a few different exercises. They might seem a little extreme, but I have found nothing better for actually making the abs stronger than the following exercises.

## **Suitcase Deadlifts**

Just like the name implies, you are lifting the bar like a suitcase. Load a barbell up, start light, and set it long ways beside you. Squat down, grasp the bar evenly with 1 hand, and stand up like you would to pick up a suitcase. These are incredibly hard on your entire core (especially obliques), and as a side bonus, they tax your grip as well.





The most important thing to keep in mind with this exercise is you are trying to keep the body perfectly straight through out the movement. Resisting the body's urge to bend towards the weight is what will strengthen the obliques tremendously. The obliques are essential for strength in not only powerlifting and strongman, but combat as well.

## **Side Bends on Steroids**

Everyone has seen the classic side bend. Someone grasps a light dumbbell in one hand, places the other hand on top of the head, and then proceeds to do a sissy ass side bend. These don't do a thing for you except make you look like a spandex wuss! If you are looking for something better, I suggest you give these a try.

Grab a barbell with 1 hand on the end of the collar, and the other hand as close to your body as your flexibility will allow. Hoist it and rack it across your shoulders.



Now, you should be holding the barbell like the above picture. Make sure to have a shoulder width stance and your knees slightly bent. Now bend to the side and attempt to touch the barbell to the ground. Pause for a second, and then flex the abs to bring yourself back up again. Try to keep from bending forward and putting pressure on your back. Bend over to the side and really use the abs for the movement-NOT the arms!

Of course, when you get freaky strong, you can add weight to the end of the barbell. Even a simple 2.5-pound plate will make this exercise much harder!

## Keg Ups

If you don't have a sparring partner to do these, I think the keg, or a heavy sandbag, works just as well. Lay on your back with your knees up, similar to the position you would be in if on the bottom of a fight. Lay the keg across your lower abs. Now, in one explosive movement, pop the hips up into the keg and lift it towards the ceiling.



Make sure to do it explosively! Once here you can do static holds, reps, or max weight. If you have ever had someone on top of you while sparring, you can already see the benefit of this great exercise. Being able to thrust up and turn violently will allow you to turn the tables on your assailant and be the one “grounding and pounding”!

## Neck Work

Neck strength is extremely important when it comes to combat situations. Let's face it, if you can neck bridge-you are going to get out of some nasty holds. Also, a strong neck prevents injury and can, believe it or not, help you in head lock situations.



A great tool for neck work is the IronMind© Head Harness. I have one, and I love it. I won't go over its use here because it is pretty self explanatory. You can also use the 4-way neck machine. Another outstanding tool if you have access to it.

## **Band Turns**

I “invented” an exercise that I really like with JumpStretch© bands. Simply loop the band around a power cage as tight as you can stand it. Then put the other end of the loop over the top of your head. Now you simply turn your head into the band tension.



Of course, the bigger the band and the tighter you loop it, the harder it gets. I haven't found any machines that will train the neck in this range of motion.

## **Barbell Neck Work**

The second exercise that I utilize is the barbell neck raise. Take a barbell and place it across your forehead. Use the hands just to balance the barbell and keep it from rolling off your head. Now just curl it up like you would with the old plate neck curls. Be careful when adding weight! This exercise can work the neck tremendously and can injure you quickly!



You can put the barbell on the back of your head as well to work the other side. This is much harder to do on your own.

## **Combat Hard**

I hope I opened some of your eyes to the importance of training for combat situations. Of course, training for the ring is much different IMO. Keep in mind, the ring and the street are as different as yoga and powerlifting. The street is about life and death. Anything goes which means if you are strong and powerful, you can do what is necessary to end the confrontation quickly.

Of course, the exercises I have listed are not the end all of combat exercises. There are many other resources out there that are packed with tips on strength and conditioning for fighting. My objective was to bring you a list of solid conditioning and strength exercises that will help you succeed in a life or death situation.

As I state before-nothing takes the place of mat time. So, get out there and DO IT!

**SURVIVE AND THRIVE!**

Until next time minions: **LIVESTRONG!**

**-Rick Walker, CSCS**