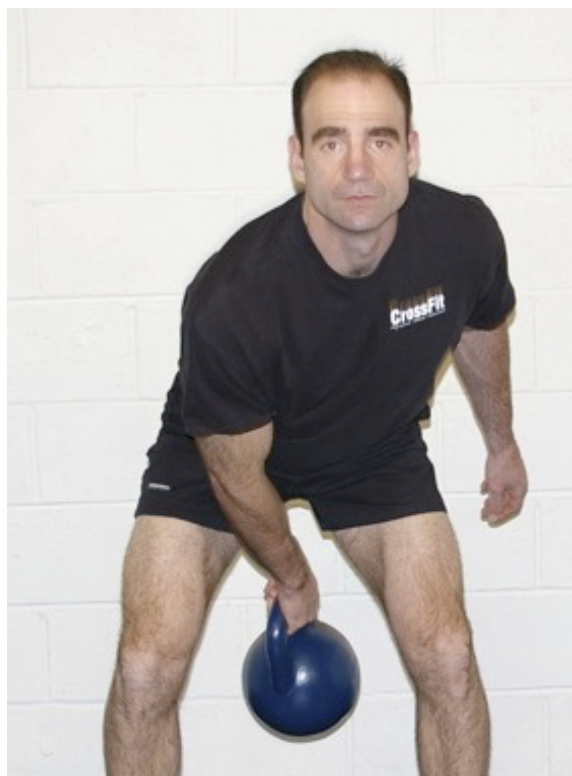


the **CrossFit**
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Kettlebell Basics

Improving Your Swing, Part 2

Jeff Martone



“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”

—William Arthur Ward

The July 2006 CrossFit Training Seminar, hosted at CrossFit San Diego, can be summed up in one word: inspiring. I found it inspiring for two reasons. First, it was an opportunity to get personal instruction from a diverse group of truly great teachers. Second, I was struck by observing the pervasiveness of a common thread of movement mechanics—specifically hip flexion to extension—that weaves through the disciplines that make up CrossFit.

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Kettlebell Basics: Improving Your Swing, Part 2 (continued...)

During his presentation, Tony Blauer made the statement “good information doesn’t displace other good information.” The seminar was practical evidence of that assertion, as it seemed that the more different coaches offered information, the more it all came together and the more they reinforced each other’s points and methods. Look at Mark Rippetoe’s [detailed analysis of the deadlift](#). The mechanics of the deadlift and the importance of achieving and maintaining lumbar and thoracic back extension during the deadlift are also essential when performing Olympic lifts or kettlebell swings, cleans, and snatches. The same holds true for Coach Burgener’s definition of the Olympic lifts as “a vicious extension of the ankles, knees, and hips that creates momentum and elevation on the barbell.” This same “vicious extension” also takes place in the jumping

movements of gymnastics and parkour. One movement, many applications—now, that’s inspiring.

Last month I covered three drills to improve your body mechanics, range of motion, power, and efficiency of movement as applied to the two-handed Russian kettlebell swing. Adding the wall squat, hip flexor recruitment drill, and hip flexor stretch that I describes into your daily warm-up should lead to a noticeable increase in your “jumping” performance. The kettlebell should feel lighter and move faster with less perceived effort.

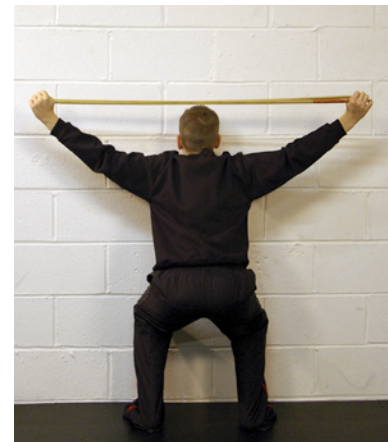
This month I will discuss a few additional kettlebell swing errors and their remedial drills, and then move on to the power swing and American swing.

Kettlebell swing troubleshooting

Problem: Rounded shoulders; shoulder blades sticking out

Solutions:

1. Look straight ahead, not down.
2. Force your chest open and pinch your shoulder blades together.
3. Perform wall squats with a rubber band or towel overhead. Concentrate on pinching your shoulder blades together.
4. Place your hand on the trainee’s back, with thumb and fore fingers touching the protruding shoulder blades, and pinch them together.

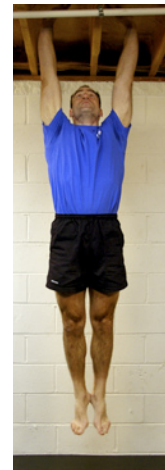


Kettlebell swing troubleshooting (continued...)

Problem: Lumbar spine flexion (i.e., tailbone tucks under) at the bottom of the swing.

Solutions:

1. Activate your hip flexors upon descending into the swing. Use the hip flexor recruitment drill I described last month to help learn to do this effectively.
2. Tight hamstrings can be contributing factor. Practice the good morning stretch:
 - a. Stand with feet hip-width apart. Hinge at the hips and bend forward, maintaining lumbar extension and keeping your chest open and head up.
 - b. Once you feel a little tightness in your hamstrings, hold that position and isometrically contract all the muscles of your lower body. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds, then exhale and relax.
 - c. When you relax, let your hamstrings lengthen, increasing your ROM. Repeat the drill 3 times.



Problem: Technique is good, but you're still not generating enough power.

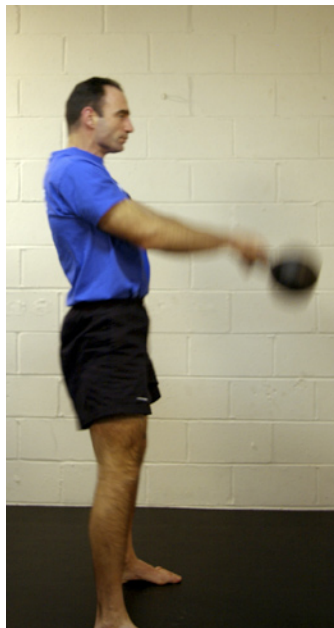
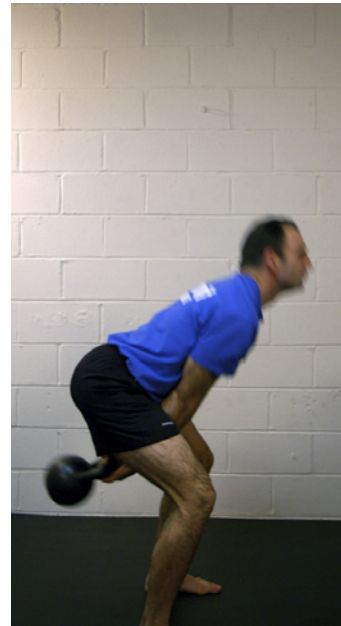
Solutions:

1. Synchronize your breathing; inhale through your nose and exhale through clenched teeth, similar to a fighter exhaling upon contact. Glutes and abs should quickly contract at the top of the swing.
2. Perform sets of standing vertical jumps between each set of swings. Remember, it's a "vicious extension of your hips, knees, and ankles."

Power swing

The power swing increases the tempo and power output of the Russian swing. In addition, it will pressure test your form. This is truly a self-correcting exercise.

1. Perform a Russian swing (i.e., to eye level).
2. When the kettlebell reaches the highest point, immediately reverse the direction, pushing it back between your legs as hard as you can. Timing is everything. It's the simultaneous contraction of your abs, lats, and chest that is the key to quickly reversing the direction.
3. Never look down. Keep your head up and eyes focused on the horizon.
4. When the kettlebell reaches its lowest point, explode out of the hole. You will notice a lot more kinetic energy built up at the bottom of your swing and more power through out your extension.
5. Be aware that your grip will be heavily taxed during this exercise. Be sure there is a clear impact zone in front and in back of you.



American swing

This is CrossFit's swing of choice. The kettlebell moves through its extreme range of motion. The swing culminates at top with the kettlebell directly overhead, and then the bell strafes the ground as it passes between the legs at the bottom. This makes for a very demanding exercise, which is why CrossFit prefers it. (Refer to issues 20 and 25 of the CrossFit Journal for more details).

If you have taken the time to practice each exercise (in order) as I prescribed in last month's article, then you should possess more than enough power to make a safe and effective transition to the American swing.

Perform one to three Russian swings, and then take it overhead.

- Keep your back arched.
- Look straight ahead.
- Keep your arms straight throughout the move.
- Keep your chest high throughout the swing, especially in the bottom position.
- Drive your hips up and forward.

When taking the kettlebell overhead, most people have a tendency to overcompensate by using their deltoids to get the kettlebell from waist or chest level to overhead. This is common in beginners who are unfamiliar with how to use their hips properly. Experienced kettlebellers can also fall prey to this error, especially toward the end of a tough routine. Overcompensating with the deltoids is less than desirable for two reasons. First, it places unnecessary strain on the deltoids. Second, the momentum it creates can be difficult to control and can place undue stress on your shoulders and lower back. This is especially true if you wait until the last second to "put on the brakes." If you have a history of shoulder injuries, it is safer to activate the brakes a little earlier. End the top of the swing just in slightly in front of your head. Be sure to powerfully contract your abs and armpit muscles at the top of the swing. Your shoulders will thank you for it later.



You have now built for yourself a very solid foundation for future kettlebell exercises. Always remember: repetition establishes habit. Vince Lombardi said "it's not practice that makes perfect, but rather it's perfect practice that makes perfect." Perfect practice is the key; accept no less. Strive for perfection and you will achieve excellence.



Jeff Martone, owner of [TacticalAthleteTrainingSystems](http://TacticalAthleteTrainingSystems.com), was one of the first certified senior kettlebell instructors in the United States. He is best known as the creator of "hand-2-hand" kettlebell juggling, SHOT training, and the T.A.P.S. pull-up system. He is also the author of six training DVDs. He was the first to implement kettlebell training in a federal law enforcement agency and now offers instructor-level certifications. He has over 15 years of experience as a full-time defensive tactics, firearms, and special-response-team instructor.