

STILL DEADLY AT 70: ARNIS GRANDMASTER VINCENTE SANCHEZ

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BLITZ

AUSTRALASIAN MARTIAL ARTS MAGAZINE

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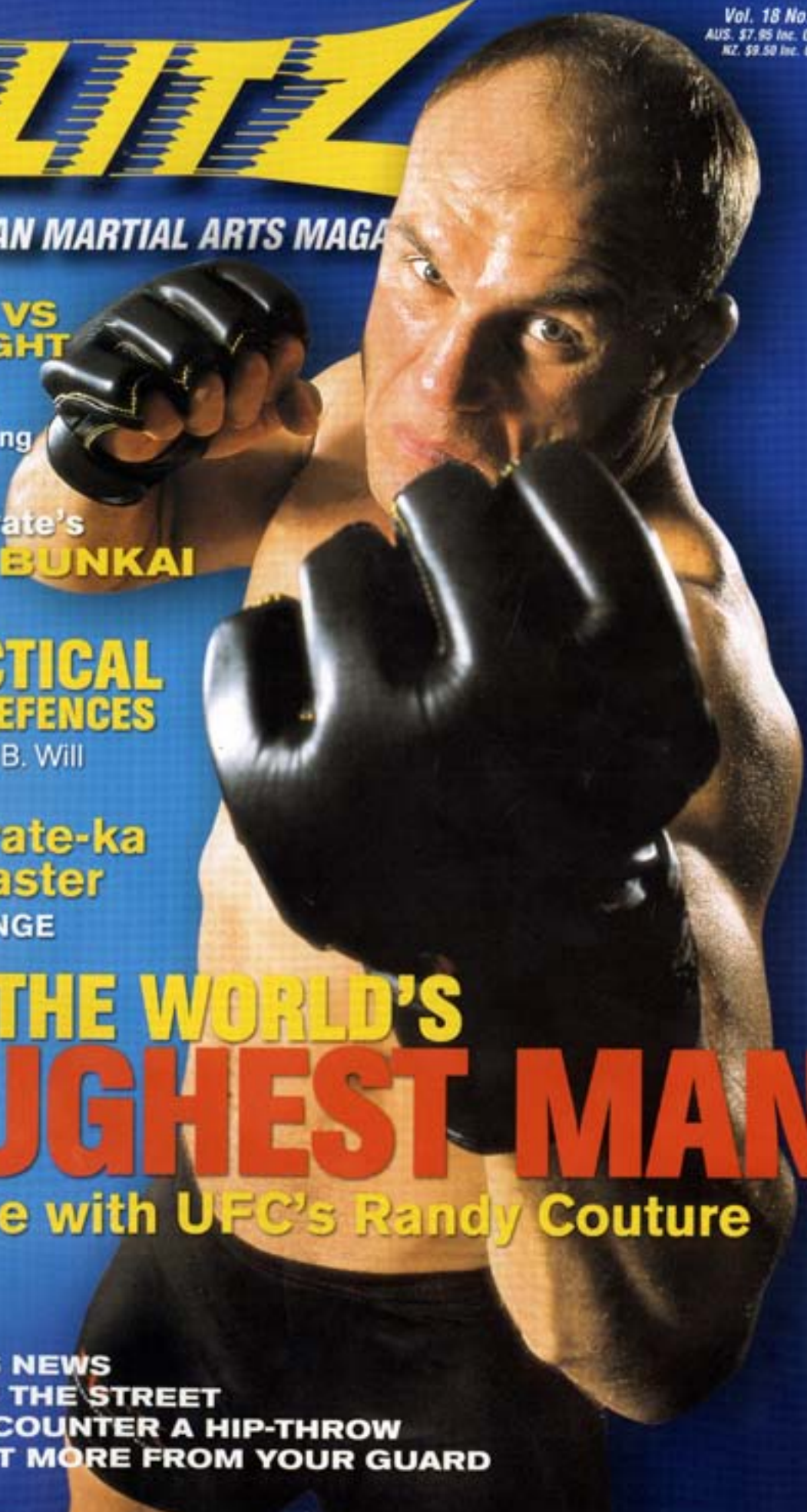
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Cut like

A practitioner of Xing yi (pronounced 'shing yee') internal kung fu, Kinesiologist Steve Cotter is two-times US full-contact Kuo Shu Kung Fu Champion and a Senior Russian Kettlebell instructor. *Blitz* asked him about his kung fu and his conditioning methods.

Blitz: How long have you been involved in martial arts? About 21 years. I'm 33 years old and I started when I was 12.

Blitz: Tell us about your kung fu titles. I'm the US Champion in the international sport of Kuo Shu. You fight on a lei tai platform, two-feet high. It's a 20-by-20 ring with no ropes. It involves punching, kicking, elbows, knees and throws. You wear four-ounce fingerless gloves, cage-style head-gear, a mouthpiece and groin cup.

There were 47 member countries at the last world championships, including USA, Australia, Taiwan, France, Brazil, China, Korea, Thailand, South Africa, Canada, Philippines, Italy, UK and Russia. The International Kuoshu Federation is the world governing body. Both Taiwan and mainland China have their own headquarters. The US Federation's website is www.uskuoshu.org/usck/index.

Blitz: Are you still competing?

I haven't competed since the Taiwanese World Games in 1996. The 2000 games were cancelled due to political reasons, so I haven't competed in about seven years. I focus on training others now.

Blitz: Do you miss competition?

I miss the training more so than the competition. To me the training is the most fulfilling part. So now I don't train as long, but still at the same intensity.

Blitz: With limited time to train these days, have your methods changed?

That's the reason I looked into kettlebells. When I was training in 1996 I didn't have a family. Now I have three children. About three years ago, my conditioning went way down. I went from training eight hours a day, six days a week to sometimes not at all. I was studying kinesiology full-time. I went from such a high level of conditioning to something well below that. I realised I wouldn't be able to train eight hours a day any more and even today if I had that luxury, I probably wouldn't want to. So I needed to get smarter with my training. This is when I came across kettlebells. I wish I'd known about them when I was competing, as they enable me to accomplish a lot more in less time.

Blitz: How do you compare your condition now to when you were training full-time?

My strength is much greater now. My body fat is not as low now due to the reduced volume in my training, but my body is more mature and I am still very lean. When I was competing, my body fat was about four per cent, now I'm about six per cent. Overall I'm a lot stronger, particularly in my grip and my back (spine). When I competed I was about 70 kilograms, now I'm about 76 kilograms.



Cotter

Kung Fu, Kettlebells and Power

Kettlebells are really the way martial artists should be training. When I was competing I did a lot of high-rep bodyweight exercises. There is a lot of value in that but they are very time-consuming and you don't get anywhere near the strength gains due to the lower resistance. It's mainly muscular endurance. It is good for beginners though, because it teaches discipline and it is a little bit safer in some ways. You are less likely to get injuries. But as far taking your strength to a new level, there is no comparison when comparing the two different methods.

Blitz: For the average martial artist, would you suggest a combination of the bodyweight drills and the kettlebells or could one solely use kettlebells?

A combination is probably best. About 75 per cent kettlebells — and even some barbell training — and 20-25 per cent bodyweight. I would limit the bodyweight exercises to things like one-legged squats, pull-ups and Hindu push-ups (for flexibility). For the most part, a martial artist should train the skills of his or her particular art. If you're a fighter that includes your combinations, slipping drills and bag work. These drills are a much better use of your time than doing push-ups. I think push-ups are useless for a high-level martial artist because they are so time-consuming and do very little for increasing contractile strength beyond the beginning levels. The better you get at them, the more you have to do to elicit an effect, which means there's less time left for other, more important skill training. The benefits of push-ups are mental discipline and muscular endurance, which can be trained more effectively by other more direct means.

Blitz: What percentages should one devote to their skills practice and their conditioning work?

I always recommend 70 per cent skill training and 30 per cent cross-training [conditioning]. If the person is strictly a fighter, there is no need for any forms/kata training. They are great for developing coordination, focus and body mechanics and

have their place. However, in fighting, the opponent's movements are not pre-arranged, and neither are yours. A fighter needs to do a lot of sparring, bag work and drills. If you're a more traditional stylist then some form work is important, because the principles of the art are contained within them. But fighters need more freestyle training. Some breathing exercises and meditation are also important, because most of the training in martial arts fighting involves hard, energy-depleting exercise. The soft training of qi gong (breathing) and meditation will balance out the hard training, providing quicker recovery and a more pinpoint focus.

As a breakdown; 60 per cent should be fighting and related drills; 10 per cent should be qi gong; 30 per cent should be cross-training, which includes sprints, jumping rope and weight/kettlebell training. The skill component is the most important factor, though this will only get you so far. If your body isn't strong then you'll be limited in your success.

Blitz: To what degree has the kettlebell strength transferred to your strikes?

A very high degree. In general, the primary benefits you'll notice initially are the increase in joint connectivity. The wrists in striking; the ankles and knees in kicking; and the hip-snap involved in punching,

kicking and throwing.

Take the basic components of a straight punch. It is primarily a rotational movement of the hips, along with a lot of hip-extension on impact. So doing something like a snatch is going to develop a lot of connective strength from the ground, transferring up into the hand. Although not the same movement, there is a very strong correlation, because the snatch will develop the same type of full-body integrated strength required in striking.

A more specific example would be the guard, with the kettlebells held in the rack position. This is a very similar position to a fighting guard — the elbows are held close to the body, and the ribcage and lats are compressed and prepared to absorb impact. Another example would be a palm-press. This is very similar mechanically to throwing a palm strike to someone's body. Many martial arts, such as Kuo Shu, allow palm strikes and they are very effective.

Looking at the principles in strength training with kettlebells and striking, you find there are a lot of similarities — in fact, they are almost identical. You alternate between a high degree of tension and a high degree of relaxation. An effective strike is based on knowing when to be tense and when to be



Cut Like Cotter

relaxed. Relaxation is equivalent to speed and tension is equivalent to strength. So the key is to have ultimate tension on impact and ultimate relaxation prior to impact. If the body is not relaxed prior to a strike, the viscosity held in the muscles will slow down the movement and reduce the potential power of the strike. Likewise, if there is insufficient tension upon impact, the force generated will reverberate back into your own body, rather than projecting into the target, and force will be lost.

Strength to technique is about a 4:1 ratio. Most of the time strength will win out over technique, unless the technique is so superior that it can overcome the deficiency in strength. A martial artist should not discount the significance of strength training as it applies to martial application. All things being equal in terms of ability, the stronger fighter will have a big advantage.

Blitz: What are the most effective kettlebell drills for martial artists?

First and foremost, the one-arm snatch, as it works the whole body from the ground up. It develops the stance, the hip-snap, the grip and anaerobic capacity. So there's a lot of immediate transfer. Then you have single cleans, double cleans, alternating cleans, bottoms-up cleans. Like the snatch, these are explosive, full-body movements, and will help in generating power for striking, as well

as teach the body how to absorb force more effectively.

Then you have front squats. Front squats for a beginner and pistols for the advanced. Front squats are superior to back squats for martial artists, and all athletes, because in the large majority of situations, the athlete has to move a weight (the opponent's body) that is in front of him, not behind him. Pistols are ideal because they address the balance and range of motion requirements necessary for athletic performance.

And finally, presses and jerks develop tremendous connective strength between the shoulders and the torso, a requirement for strong punching.

Blitz: What are the most notable changes to your body composition since using kettlebells?

My back, and in particular my lats are much fuller and stronger. I've learned how to use my lats much better when striking. All heavy-hitters learn how to use their lats. You see that in boxing. Most of the strong punchers have almost no chest development and tremendous lat development. A great example would be Thomas 'Hit Man' Hearn or Jeff Fenech. They had great lat development and knew how to use them for powerful strikes.

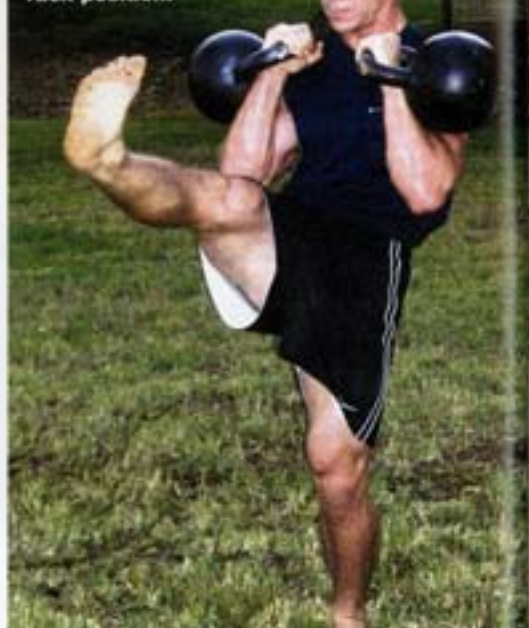
My trapezius, forearms and core are also a lot stronger. The core is everything from above your knees to your chest. That includes your spinal extensors, your intercostal muscles of the ribs, abdominals, obliques and your hips. This area, along with the grip, is what the kettlebells mainly address.

Blitz: Kettlebells aren't widely known or used in Australia. Where do you see them in future, in regards to gyms and martial arts schools?

People are starting to recognise that the key to success in fitness is not with all these fancy gadgets gyms are filled with, but with the proper education and commitment to training. People are looking more at a holistic approach in training mind and body. They are also wanting to train on their own at home. I see that this is slowly having an effect on the industry. Kettlebells are starting to get very big now in the states, but they are not yet mainstream. In five years time they will be mainstream. In America, Mixed Martial Arts are becoming very popular. These guys who fight for a living are constantly looking for cutting-edge training methods. Certainly kettlebells are going to appeal to them, because they work.

Blitz: The Russians are well known for their amazing kettlebell-lifting feats in the sport of girevoy. What are some of your

Cotter performs single-leg squats while holding two 32 kg KBs in the rack position.



awe-inspiring strength/strength endurance accomplishments?

When I was into mostly bodyweight training, I did 80 consecutive one-leg squats per leg (160 total), 300 consecutive knuckle pushups, 30 minutes straight holding deep horse-stance, 130 consecutive Hindu pushups, 30 minutes consecutive deep duck-walking, 200 consecutive jack-knife sit-ups and 50 consecutive handstand push-ups. Now that I'm so into KB training, some of the recent feats I've accomplished are: one-leg squats with 64 kg (140 lbs) held in the rack position, dead hang on a pull up bar for one minute with bodyweight plus 75 kg... I am currently working on the goal of doing 1,000 consecutive one-arm snatches with a 16 kg KB. I'm up to over 600 repetitions right now, and expect to meet my goal within two months. I don't know if these are awe-inspiring, but I know I enjoy the training immensely and it keeps me in incredible shape!

Steve Cotter holds a BSc in kinesiology from San Diego State University, CSCS National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) and is a Health/Fitness Instructor with the American Colleges of Sports Medicine (ACSM). Steve is also creator of the Full KContact Kettlebell program, in which he breaks down fundamental martial arts skills and explains how to improve their mechanical power using kettlebell training. Steve is planning workshops in Australia later this year. For more info, visit www.australian-kettlebells.com **BLITZ**



Steve Cotter pressing a 32 kg kettlebell.