

MOVIE GIVEAWAY! ONG BAK: THAI BOXING TAKES CINEMA BY STORM

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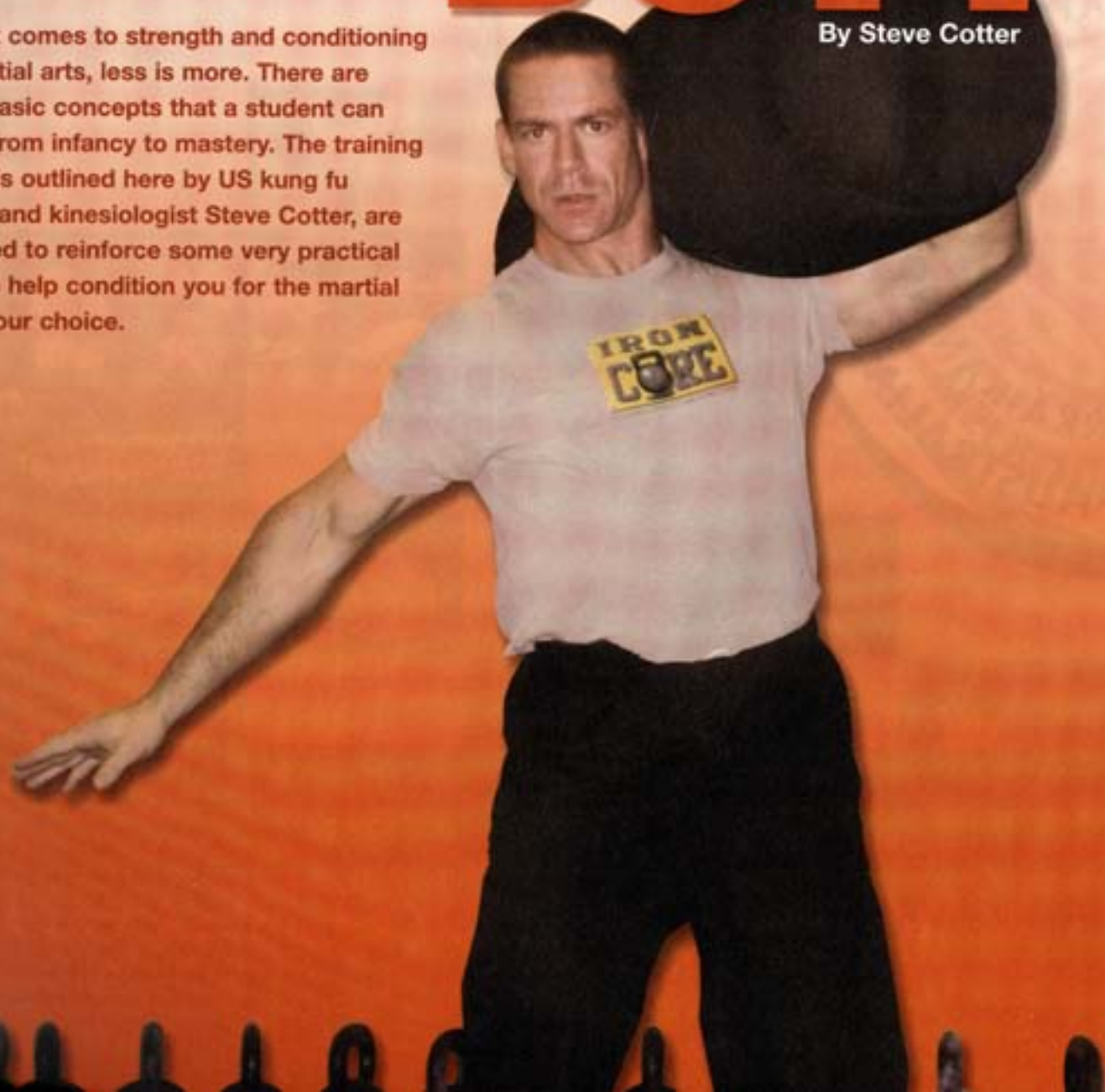


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HEAVY DUTY

By Steve Cotter

When it comes to strength and conditioning for martial arts, less is more. There are some basic concepts that a student can follow from infancy to mastery. The training methods outlined here by US kung fu champ and kinesiologist Steve Cotter, are designed to reinforce some very practical skills to help condition you for the martial art of your choice.



We will work on these key premises:

1. The art is the skill. This means that only dedicated practice of your art will produce great ability. Your strength and conditioning program augments your art; it does not attempt to replace it.

2. The best martial artists are athletes. Improved athleticism increases physical abilities in all forms of movement. To become a better martial artist, become a better athlete. In practical terms, this means leaving no aspect unattended to in your overall training: speed, power, fluidity, stamina, accuracy. This particular article focuses on strength and conditioning. The broader scope of athleticism will be covered in more detail in future articles. For the purposes here, adapt the attitude that you are an athlete and let every training session reflect that standard.

3. The way we best approach strength training for impact sports is by referring to the two key attributes in the expression of powerful movement — you might say the yin and yang of performance:

- Stability — rootedness, strength, solidity
Energy is stored.
- Mobility — fluid movement, positioning,
application of stored energy.

The interplay of these two phases with our array of skills is what determines movement efficacy. Some examples are: stability on one leg while delivering a front thrust-kick; lateral mobility while slipping for a counter-punch; absorbing a punch or kick to the ribs; and setting position for a hip-throw.

Everything in movement involves a shifting in and out of positions. This can easily be seen in all sports, such as when a rugby player is going full-speed, stops to change direction (stability), then explodes in a new direction (mobility).

This article focuses on how to increase the stability and mobility of your movements through a strength and conditioning program



that uses basic skills and simple tools. Keep in mind that this program is intended to augment the regular practise of your martial arts skills.

The drills below are presented using a variety of tools that are easy to acquire. The important thing is to use what training tools you have at your disposal and go about making serious gains in your strength and conditioning.

Crane-dips (one-leg squats)

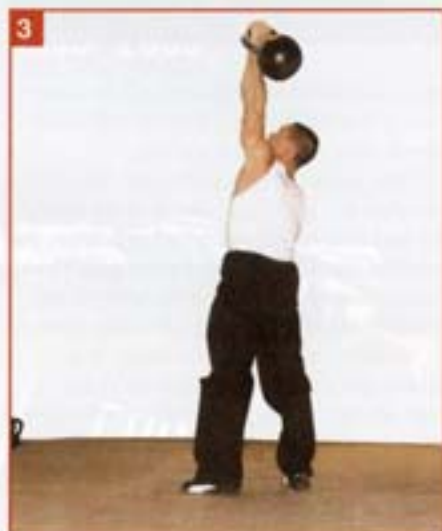
Crane-dips (below) develop great mobility in the joints of the lower body, as well as tremendous stability in your core musculature. These are indispensable for martial artists, as they develop strength and endurance in the legs, as well as balance for kicking and footwork, and leverage for grappling.

How to do it:

Stand on one leg with your foot rooted to the ground. Extend the other leg straight out at waist level. The arms are stretched out to the side as though pressing against walls on either side of your body. Keep your body as upright and extended as possible. Inhale and sit down and back over your heel. Keeping your foot flat, grip the floor with your foot and tighten your body; explode upward through the heel as you exhale. Perform 10 repetitions per leg. (For an in-depth tutorial on one-leg squats, refer to Steve's article at www.fullcontact.com — Ed.)

Turkish get-ups (TGUs)

The TGU (above right) is an old wrestling drill and is among the most complete exercises



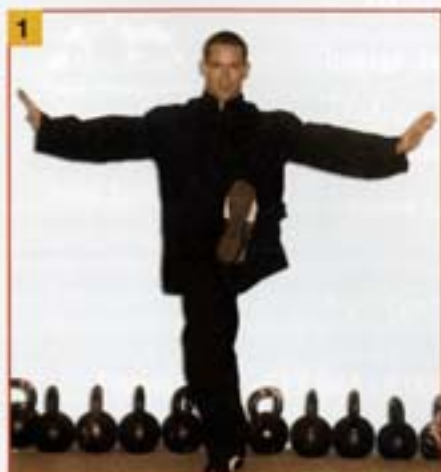
in existence, because it teaches so many valuable components simultaneously. TGUs develop shoulder stability and extreme flexibility. For martial artists, this means more solid strikes and greater ability to sustain and avoid joint-locks. TGUs require full-body connection, which is the key to powerful movement — using the body as a whole. Grace under fire is exemplified here; the perfect example of stability in mobility.

How to do it:

Lie on your back and press the dumbbell or kettlebell directly over your shoulder. It is very important that the weight is pressed from the back muscles (lat) and that the shoulder stays in the socket. In other words, do not try to press and hold the weight with just the shoulder. Learn to use your strong back muscles to move the weight.

Keep your eye on the weight at all times and keep the weight directly over your shoulder and hip. Shift over to the non-weight side and extend your free hand out to the side, to brace against the floor for balance.

At this point, you are using a strong push from your abdominal muscles. Tuck your leg on the non-weighted side close to your butt; place the leg on the weighted side in front with the knee bent and foot on the ground. The support arm pushes off the floor while the body rocks forward until you are in the stable lunge position. Note that the forward foot is on the



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same side as the kettlebell and you are stable here. The kettlebell has not drifted and is still directly over the shoulder and hip.

Now, project straight up through the kettlebell and stand up, pushing off the heel of the lead foot. As you reach the top position, the rear foot steps up to balance the stance. From the top position, reverse the movements until you are lying on the ground in the start position.

Keep the reps low. Use a weight that challenges you and allows you up to five reps per arm. Start by alternating arms every rep for a total of 10. As you become more proficient, you will do all reps on one hand before switching.

Weighted chin-ups with gi

Weighted chin-ups are a great pulling exercise. By wrapping your gi jacket or a thick towel around the bar, you add a tremendous grip component, which is ideal for developing hand strength for grappling. This is a full-body tension exercise and the purpose is to develop raw pulling power, which is a great benefit for grappling and throws.

How to do it:

(Below) Loop your gi over a standard pull-up bar. Grab one end in each hand and wrap around your hands like a vice. The key is total body tension by crushing the hands, flexing



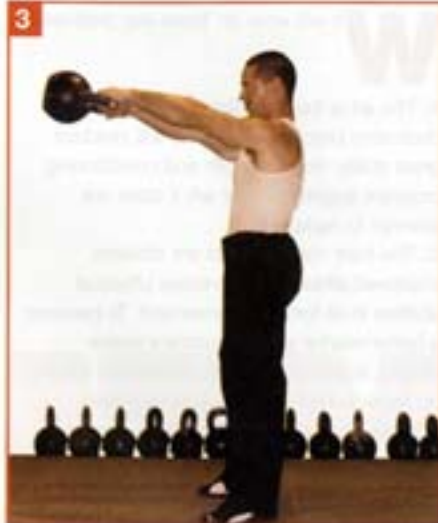
the forearms, squeezing the legs together, tightening the abdominals, activating the lats and pressurising the breath in the diaphragm.

Start from a dead-hang position with the arms straight. One you've loaded your body with complete tension, pull yourself up so that your head moves over the bar. Lower back down to the dead-hang position.

If you are just starting out with chin-ups, start with bodyweight and work up to sets of 10 reps. As soon as you have a conditioning base, start adding weight by using a chinning belt. The goal is low reps (up to five) with as heavy a weight as you can safely move. This is also a full-body exercise.

Kettlebell swings

Swings (shown above) are one of the very best exercises for teaching bracing. Bracing is the alignment of the entire body so that you are braced not only for impact (stability), but like a loaded spring. You're also braced to unleash powerful movements. Swings teach a powerful hip-snap, develop flexibility and co-ordination of the stance and core musculature of the torso, instruct proper breathing, and build a great grip for grappling. I personally prefer kettlebells for most of my free-weight training. However, dumbbells can be used in place of kettlebells for swings.



How to do it:

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. With weight on the heels, sit back with the hips and grab the kettlebell with the base of the palm, wrap the fingers around the handle and squeeze tightly. Pull the shoulder blades together and keep your eyes forward. Stand straight up. The free hand is kept out to the side, as a counterbalance to the weighted hand. To initiate the swing, inhale and sit back with the hips and let the arm and kettlebell swing back through your legs, as far as you comfortably can. Now, press vigorously into the ground with the heels as you exhale, so that the knees extend fully (thighs are flexed at the top) and hips press all the way forward (the buttock muscles are completely clenched).

The kettlebell moves to a focal point directly in front of you, as in a target for your strike. Start with low swings at about navel level. Be sure to move through the stance and stay rooted, weight on heels. Always feel in control with the momentum of the weight. Progress to chest level, then head-level swings. Grip the weight tightly so that it's an extension of your hand and not simply a passive object. On the downswing, simply sit back into your stance with the hips, and allow the weight to fall without resistance. Absorb the downward momentum with your stance, by sitting way back and loading the butt and hamstrings and allowing the weight to swing far behind you (remember, weight on heels). Now you are pressure-loaded for the next swing. Finish all sets on the downswing.

Begin with low rep sets and emphasise perfect form. Progress to sets of 15-30 reps, depending upon your conditioning level. Train one hand and then switch and train the other without pause (15 reps means 15 reps with each hand).

Heavy-bag squat

This exercise uses a heavy bag or sandbag and is great for teaching how to use the stance

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for leverage. It trains hip-snap and teaches you how to get low in your stance. Done quickly, the pattern is an excellent cardiovascular conditioning drill.

How to do it:

(Right) Stand the heavy bag upright. Sit down into your stance and put one shoulder into the body of the bag and wrap it up the arm. The opposite arm is holding for balance. Pop the bag onto your shoulder as you stand up. Holding on the shoulder, squat down to rock bottom, then explode. Drop the bag and repeat to other shoulder.

Do this for speed. Start with a 50lb (20-25kg) bag for beginners and 100lb (45-50kg) for the more conditioned. Start with five on each shoulder in one minute, then try to increase reps by going faster. Make sure you use full range of motion when racing (don't cheat yourself by using sloppy form). This is a great contest to do with a training partner.

Putting it all Together

The entire sequence should be performed in a circuit. The program emphasis is one of overall strength-endurance, so the goal is to go through the five exercises with minimal or no rest. Do three circuits successively. Start with two days per week. If you recover well,



add another day per week. Advanced practitioners in great condition can increase to four days per week. Remember that all programs must be adapted according to level. Vary the weight used, rest periods, repetitions, sets and order to keep the training fresh and productive. Allow adequate rest and good fuel for recovery.

Steve Cotter is an American champion martial artist, kettlebell expert and producer of the widely acclaimed FullKONtact™ strength and conditioning videos and instructional programs. Steve will be offering training seminars in Australia in 2005. For information email info@fullkontakt.com **BLITZ**