
FEDERAZIONE - GHIRI SPORT - ITALIA

HISTORY OF KETTLEBELL

From I.G.S.F. book

Man has always been trying to master his physical skills. Whether driven by the need for survival, or the desire for supremacy, or simply by the instinct to have a healthy body and maintaining good health, he's always been trying to improve himself. To do this, the mere human body couldn't be enough: just the fact that bodyweight remains every day almost the same, makes clear that the results of training can hardly improve after a certain level. So man invented tools, exercise equipment with which vary muscular stimulation.

One of the oldest tools of history is the kettlebell. Its ancient origins date back to ancient Egypt, China and Hellenic culture. Back then, in the form of jars filled with soil, kettlebells were used to enhance fighters' body strength.

The modern origin date of kettlebells (as we know them) is 1704, when the first Russian dictionary containing the definition of kettlebell was printed. At that time, kettlebell's shape wasn't universal (it will become round only in 1797), only it's weight was well-defined: in fact, the tool was used as a counterbalance for scales, and it's unit was the pood (16 kg). The merchants, beside lifting the merchandise throughout the day, also had to defend against thieves and crooks, so they often trained with kettlebells in coarse movements; or, when the negotiations with buyers were finished, they challenged each other to raise 4 pood (64 kg) more times over their heads. The instrument quickly became known, people were literally astonished on the ability of those men to lift those heavy tools.

The Russian Circus became one of the houses of the instrument until Tsar Alexander III spread its fame throughout the Country. The monarch used to train with kettlebells. One day in 1888, while he was traveling with his family, the train in which they were derailed. The roof of the sovereigns' car fell on the whole royal family. Alexander III, to his surprise, was able to withstand the full weight of the roof until rescuers came to help. Incredulous of this tremendous strength, the Tsar saw in kettlebells the tools that saved him. The story spread throughout the Country, so began the first competitions under the patronage of the sovereign.

In addition to physical strengthening, kettlebells became the instruments for maintaining the health of the population: in 1885 was born in St. Petersburg the first sports-medical association which used the kettlebell as a tool for the prevention of physical problems. Throughout the 19th century, kettlebells also served as training tool for the soldiers who had to move quickly the cannonballs.

Even after the revolution, the fame didn't get low. The USSR was a huge country that was preparing to move from a medieval state to one of the greatest world power. The effectiveness and the appearance of the soldiers was crucial. Often soldiers served in remote villages in Siberia or in the navy, and physical training on the ships was a problem. Scientists and coaches of that time met, and from those meetings came the kettlebell we know today. The instrument became the main responsible of the effectiveness and fitness of the soldiers.

In 1960 began the first military competitions of kettlebell lifting, and those competitions were held until 1992, after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the International Gira Sport Federation (I.G.S.F.) was founded.

The competitions are run in 10 minutes. 4 pood (64 kg) for men in long cycle and jerk, 2 pood (32 kg) for the snatch. Women use a pood (16 kg) in the snatch.

Today, I.G.S.F. includes the following countries: Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tatarstan, Uzbekistan, Canada, USA, Finland, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Greece, Poland, Australia, Iran, Targikistan, Kirghistan and India.

FITTING AS A UNIVERSAL LAW

Man is an “homeostatic creature”: he adapts to stimulations. “Survival of the fittest” is one of the main principles of biology: even training should look at this law! All of the physiological modifications are a direct consequence of the stimulations induced by physical exercise.

To make “positive” modifications happen in a human body, it’s necessary to use “overloads” in training in order to increase the whole training volume. Training volume (intensity, density, volume…) should progressively increase day by day to induce the body to fit to the new condition. The problem arises when we fall into “addiction”. This biological fact makes that a body responds less and less to every stimulation, even with an increase of the training volume, down to a plateau level.

In order to avoid this, we can:

1. Constantly change exercises
2. Learn programming

In this course we’ll learn the harder (but the only one which grants effective results) way: programming.

3 SIMPLE RULES…

Before thinking how much you have to do, you have to understand how to do it

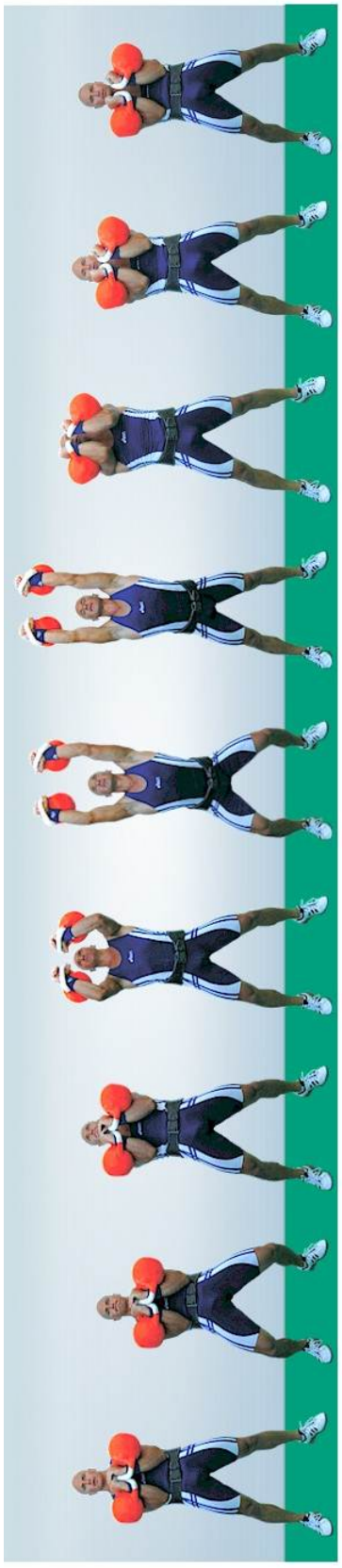
1. The first rule to be respected when using a kettlebell is to preserve your center of gravity: the more you do it, the less you waste energy. When you lift the kettlebell from the ground, its weight plus your bodyweight makes your gravity center to move forward. So, just shift your bodyweight to your heels to make the kettlebell move to you. This simple concept is applied in every movement: swing, snatch, clean. Every time the kettlebell is in front of you, your bodyweight must be shifted behind you, either the kettlebells are going up or down. Squat position, often used, is a variant of this movement, but the beginner has to learn to move the kettlebell with his bodyweight first (it requires core and abdominal strength), and focus on more peripheral areas later.
2. Kettlebell is a tool that you don’t have to grip. The handle fits on the carpal bone and the hand has to stay free. Grip the handle (even without bending your wrist) and you will see a dramatic accumulation of lactic acid in the muscles of your forearm, with a consequent loss of strength.
3. The weight of the kettlebell must “loaded on your body axis”. Either when the kettlebells are over the head or when in rack position, the weight you lift must be perpendicular to your center of gravity. The more it goes far from it, the more you waste energy. Some muscular tensions could make the person to look to the kettlebells when he lifts them, or bend a little to find equilibrium. Joints and muscular tests before learning the techniques can reveal possible muscle imbalances which must be kept into consideration.

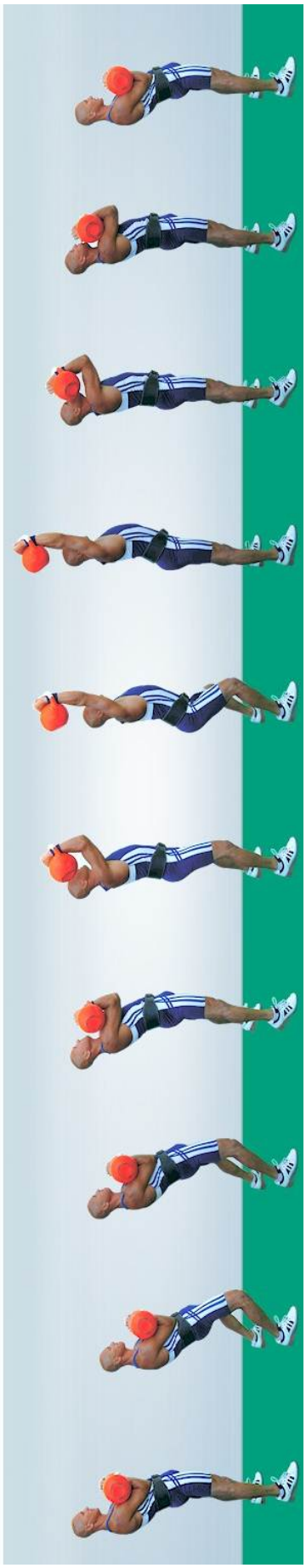
Kettlebell Lifting (Ghiri Sport)

Kettlebell lifting was born as a way to test physical condition of soldiers in USSR. “Resisting force” is the main requisite for this activity. However, resisting force is directly influenced by maximal strength and resistance. So, to obtain good results, you have to train both your anaerobic and aerobic system. Kettlebell lifters (ghirevik) are complete athletes. Learning to rest in difficult conditions makes the athlete to improve his recovering capacity: in all the “fighting sports”, such as fight, boxing, sambo… kettlebell is a particularly appreciated tool. You have to learn to stay calm, even when your breath runs out and your joints are stressed, and you will have the world in your kettlebell!

Rack Position

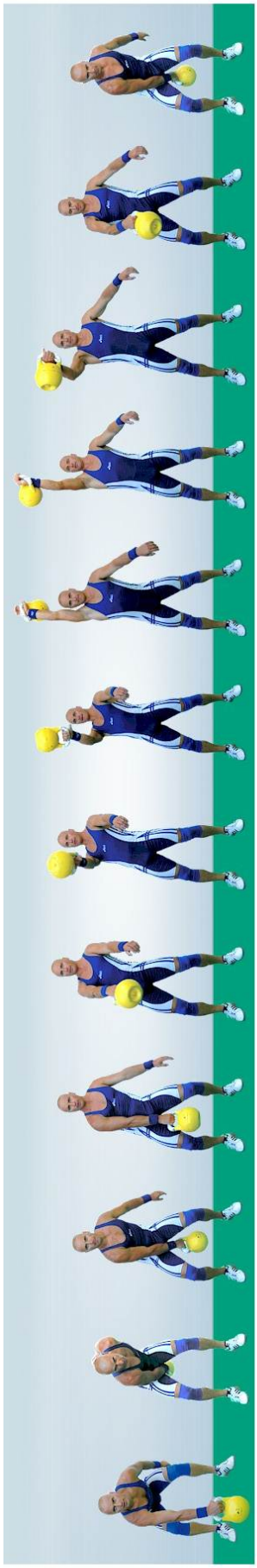
Kettlebells’ weight must lean on your iliac crests, legs, feet, without stressing the back. Quadriceps must be a little stretched. If you feel pain on your lumbar area and you can’t keep this position, you have to do stretching exercises specific for the iliopsoas. The natural curves of the rachis have to be accentuated. The rack position should be learned gradually, with stretching exercises for both the back and the antero-inferior chain. Deadlifts and squats should be performed as a supplement to enhance erector spinae muscles.

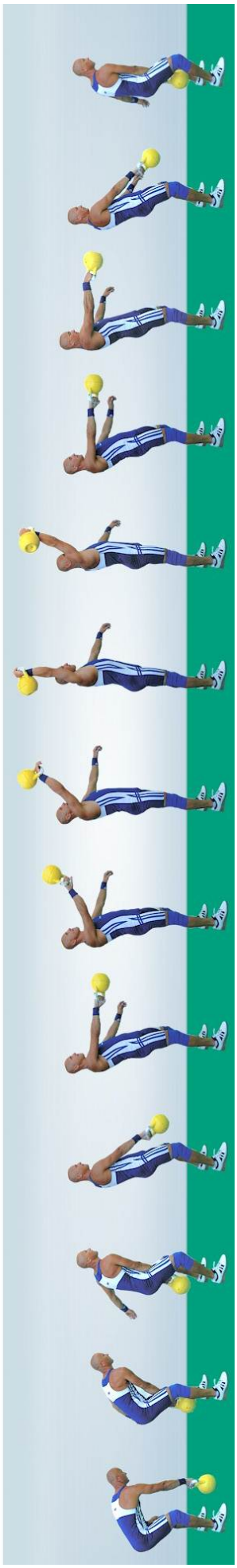




Jerk

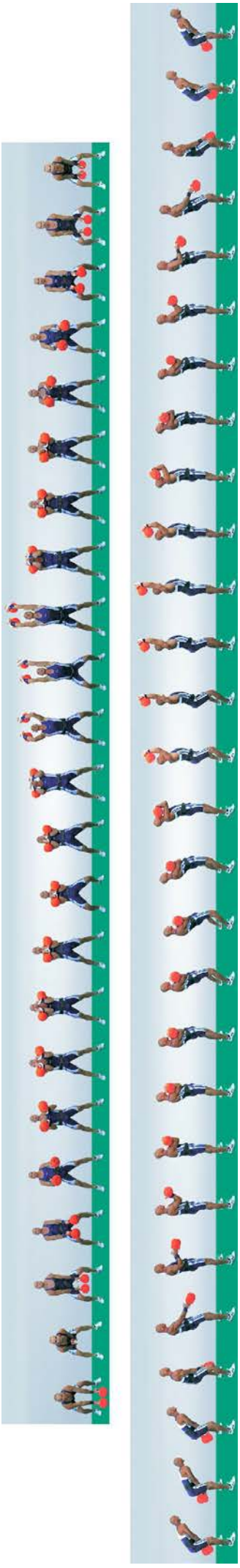
From rack position, breathe in and slightly dip your knees, push your pelvis upwards, like a jump, and shift your bodyweight on your toes. Hips push directly the elbows upwards, shoulders are semi-relaxed until the kettlebells reach head level, then do a second knee dip, move your pelvis back-down, arch your back and straighten your arms. Straighten your legs and stop with kettlebells over your head. After that, lower the kettlebells accompanying them, when your elbows touch your hips, breathe out, eventually amortizing with your legs, and return to rack position.





Snatch

Place the kettlebell at about 20-40 cm from your feet, in front of you. Shift your bodyweight on your heels and pull the kettlebell between your legs. When the kettlebell reverses its motion, shift your bodyweight forward, pushing with the pelvis. The sooner your forearm lose contact with your pelvis, the sooner your arm will begin to work, so don't do it too early. Back chain pushes the kettlebell vertically, shoulder and arm are semi-relaxed, adductors of the shoulder blade keep it down. When the kettlebell reaches eye level, pull slightly backwards your shoulder. The kettlebell must reverse its motion and get closer to you. In this moment, push forward with shoulder, the kettlebell moves on your forearm's side and your hand fits the handle. Your torso remains upright, and your straight arm must be perpendicular to your center of gravity. After that, shift your bodyweight again on your heels and begin to "relax" your arm, then the kettlebell will move on your forearm's side. The more the kettlebell pulls you forward, the more your bodyweight must be directed backward. When your arm gets back to your pelvis level, slightly dip your knees to amortize. From now on, your forearm must be in contact with your pelvis: move your pelvis following the kettlebell motion until it reverses it again between your legs.



Long Cycle

Place the kettlebells at about 20-40 cm from your feet, in front of you. Shift your bodyweight on your heels and pull the kettlebells between your legs. When the kettlebells reverse their motion, shift your bodyweight forward, pushing with the pelvis and perform a clean. Then, from rack position, breathe in and slightly dip your knees, push your pelvis upwards, like a jump, and shift your bodyweight on your toes. Hips push directly the elbows upwards, shoulders are semi-relaxed until the kettlebells reach head level, then do a second knee dip, move your pelvis back-down, arch your back and straighten your arms. Straighten your legs and stop with kettlebells over your head (same as jerk). After that, lower the kettlebells accompanying them and, when your elbows touch your hips, don't stop in rack position but slightly push the kettlebells away from you and keep accompanying them until your arms get back to your pelvis level. At this point, slightly dip your knees to amortize and, from now on, your forearms must be in contact with your pelvis: move your pelvis following the kettlebells motion until they reverse it again between your legs.

Basic principles of programming

1. If you want to learn properly any athletic movement, you have to repeat it many times. If you are a beginner, it's useless to focus on the intensity of your training, you'd better repeat the movement again and again. Each exercise on which you want to get better must be repeated at least 2-3 times a week: the motion pattern, from the over-cortical pathway will pass to the subcortical, becoming automatic.

2. Additional exercises must be performed to strengthen the weak parts of your lift (grip, back, legs, shoulders). In these exercises, muscular work prevails on technical work. A functional hypertrophy empowers the technical movement and improves the performance.

3. If you're training for an athletic movement more than a day a week, you'd better divide your training in light-medium-heavy day. You can't work every day on your 100%, all the stress accumulated will preclude you from getting results.

4. Light day: focus on the technique.

5. Medium day: focus on training volume.

6. Heavy day: focus on the intensity (next to your maximal).

7. Each week must be inserted in a training cycle, i.e. in a progression. Repeating day by day the same training is pointless: each training day must look at the previous and the next one. You have to plan your training, even if some contingency could get the best on your plan.

8. Each cycle must be defined on the result of a test at the end of the previous cycle, and must be concluded with a test: programming is based on numbers!

9. Training makes your body to accumulate stress, so, every 3-6 weeks do a week of light training to lower your stress level.

10. Training must be defined on the single person. A sedentary will get an adequate stimulation just by going up and down the stairs. If you go too far, you won't get results. The more the training is intense, the more it requires recovery, but you can work on that! The higher your performance is , the less you will need time for recovery, but 3 days of training a week are the best indication for an average nine-to fiver.

Some examples...

(these are JUST EXAMPLES!) You can find others at

http://www.ghirisport.it/training.html

Aerobic training:

2 hands swing: 2'
One hand swing: 1' left + 1' right
One arm clean: 1' left + 1' right
Chin pulls: 1'
Kettlebell row: 1'
Kettlebell bench press: 1'
Front squat: 1'
Calf: 1'
Kettlebell rear lunge: 1'
Kettlebell push-ups: 1'
Get ups: 1' left + 1' right
Kettlebell Jumps: 1'
Nimbleness: 3' – 4'

Anaerobic training:

2 hands swing: 3' – intensive
Kettlebell Jumps: 1' – intensive
One arm clean: 1' left + 1' right - intensive

How to read:

16+16(**Kettlebell weight**)/10(**reps**)x7(**sets**)(2'- **rest minutes**)
60-80%(**percentages of your maximal**)/10(**reps in a single set**)
16(**Kettlebell weight**)/10+10(**snatch reps** 10 **left +**10 **right**)

DAY 1

1.warm up 15' muscle exercises (arms, torso, legs)
2.jerk:16+16/10-15x5(2-3')
3.rack position:16+16/2'x2(2')
4.half jerk:16+16/1'x2(2')
5.fixation - hang over the head: 16+16/20"x2(1')
6.barbell squat:60-80%/6-10x3(2-3')
7.barbell deadlift:60-80%/6-10x3(2-3')
8.bench press (close grip):60-80%/6-10x3(2')
9.pull ups:6-8x3(2')
10.crunches:20-25x3(2')
11.nimbleness:5'

DAY 2

1.warm up 15' muscle exercises (arms, torso, legs)
2.snatch:16/10-15+10-15x5(2-3')
3.one arm swing:16/1'+1'x2(2')
4.Kettlebell hang: 6/2'+2'
5.russian sit ups:12+12/10+10x3(2')
6.jump on boxes:16/10x3(1')
7.torso extension:10-15x3(2')
8.forearms (extensions and push-ups): 40-50%/12-15x3(1')
9.crunches:20-25x3(2')
10.nimbleness:5'

DAY 3

1.warm up 15'(every muscle)
2.jerk:16+16/5,10,15,30(2')
3.snatch: 16/5+5,10+10,15+15,30+30(2')
4.half squat:60%/20x3(2')
5.barbell deadlift:60%20x3(2')
6.45° bench press (close grip):60%/15x3(2')
7.pull ups:8-10x3(2')
8.kettlebell crunches:16kg/12-15for each one x2(2')
kettlebell side-clean
9.nimbleness 5'