
ENTER THE KETTLEBELL!

Strength
Secret of
The Soviet
Supermen



WITH
PAVEL



ENTER THE KETTLEBELL!

**Strength Secret
of The Soviet
Supermen**



**BY
KAVEL**

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— *Table of Contents* —

Foreword by Dan John **IX**

Preface: A Step to the Left and I Shoot **XI**

“Do it this way!”... the no more guesswork, failure is not an option quick start guide to kettlebell success... *Power to the People!* for kettlebells.

Introduction: When We Say “Strength,” We Mean “Kettlebell.” When We Say “Kettlebell,” We Mean “Strength.” **XIII**

How the Kettlebell Has Bred Weakness Out of the Russian Gene Pool **XIII**

The Russian recipe for doubling or tripling your strength... Sergey Mishin—from 17-year old weakling to the number-one kettlebell lifter in the world... *girevik* as the symbol of strength... Pyotr Kryloff, the “King of Kettlebells”... Russian Olympic weightlifting or “heavy athletics” and Dr. Vladislav Krayevskiy, the father of kettlebells... the “courage corner”... the toughest troops... kettlebells as the backbone of Russian military strength training... Russian law enforcement and kettlebells... prison inmates and kettlebell training... why Soviet scientists gave the kettlebell two thumbs-up... the Voropayev study—kettlebells boost pull-ups, jumping, and running... the Vinogradov & Lukyanov study—kettlebells improve fitness across the board... the studies by Luchkin and Laputin—kettlebells improve coordination and agility... the Lopatin study—the stronger a soldier is with kettlebells, the faster on the obstacle course... the Soviet armed forces strength training manual—kettlebell training “one of the most effective means of strength development... new era in the development of human strength-potential”... the Shevtsova study—lowering the heart rate and blood pressure naturally... why this hardcore tool is surprisingly safe... the Gomonov study—consistently low body fat in kettlebell lifters... Rasskazov—balanced development of all organs and musculature with significant hypertrophy of shoulder girdle.

Chronicle of the Russian Kettlebell Invasion of America **XIX**

Kettlebells and the American iron men of old... Bob Peoples and Sig Klein... rise of the machines... Marty Gallagher, MILO and the subversive *Vodka, Pickle Juice, Kettlebell Lifting, and Other Russian Pastimes*, 1998... John Du Cane and the manufacture of the first Russian kettlebell in America, publication of first book and DVD, *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge*, 2001... national media explosion, 2002... kettlebells change the face of exercise in America.

Chapter 1: Enter the Kettlebell!

Which Kettlebells Should I Start With?

1

What is a kettlebell? . . . main benefits of kettlebell training... guidelines—choosing the correct size of kettlebell for men and women of differing backgrounds, strength and skills... do you need two kettlebells of the same size? ... understanding your goals with kettlebells—why higher numbers or heavier is not necessarily better.

How to Make Your Hips, Back, and Shoulders Speak Russian Body Language

5

Stop driving with your parking brake on... developing flexibility in the hip flexors for greater power... the kettlebell preschool test... the kettlebell Sumo Deadlift checklist... flexibility remedy: Face-the-Wall Squat—how to make the fastest gains... the Halo for looser shoulders... the Pump Stretch... the kettlebell Sumo Deadlift Lockout checklist.

“It’s Your Fault”: Kettlebell Safety 101

19

Ten key tips to have your strength and your health too... checking with the correct medical professional... managing your environment... Party approved footwear for those who choose to say no to poor performance, punishment or injury... pleading no contest for space with the kettlebell... practicing safety to make safety permanent... why cool-downs, not warm-ups are essential for your health and safety... what you must know about your heart rate and kettlebell training... common sense and training loads.

Safety as a Part of, Not the Opposite of, Performance

23

Nine secrets for guaranteeing greater strength and reduced risk of injury in your kettlebell training... moving from the hips... the special hip-fold... why you must avoid slouching after workouts—and what to do instead... staying tight in the waist, to protect the back... when and where to stay loose in your movement... taming the arc... keeping the shoulders in their sockets... shoulder retraction drill... pull-up bar drill... how to avoid hyperextending your wrists... locking out the elbows—why and when... the secrets of proper hand care—for longevity in your kettlebell lifting... lotions, potions and other necessary evils for the task in hand... more expert advice from the hand-abuse-trenches.

Chapter 2: The New RKC Program Minimum

Practice Before Workout: The Break-in Plan

39

The two staples of the Russian Kettlebell Challenge program—Swing and Get-up... building skill by practicing, not working out.

The Swing—for Legs and Conditioning That Won't Quit 43

The single most effective strength and conditioning exercise in the world? ... mechanics of a good and a bad Swing... the three essential standards for a perfect Swing ... Swing mastery, Step #1, the Box Squat... powerlifters' secret for improving squat depth, flexibility, technique, and power... special tips, techniques and warnings... Swing mastery, Step #2, the Box Squat to a vertical jump... Swing mastery, Step #3, the Towel Swing... fast-forward your technique with this high-yield drill... taking the upper body out of the equation... self-correction and quicker feedback for faster progress... proper timing between hip movement and the arms... Swing mastery, Step #4, the Swing proper... correct and incorrect breathing... the one-arm swing... the hand-to-hand swing.

The Get-up—for Shoulders That Can Take Punishment and Dish It Out 61

Miraculous shoulder comebacks... developing shoulder mobility and stability... pressing heavier... the six essential standards for a perfect Get-up... Get-up mastery, Step #1, pick your kettlebell up and put it down safely... how to pick up the kettlebell without straining the elbow... the correct grip and shoulder placement... Get-up mastery, Step #2, keep your elbow straight and your shoulder in its socket... a great visualization from Iyengar Yoga... Get-up mastery, Step #3, the Half Get-up... magical fix for many a ruined shoulder... Get-up mastery, Step #4, the Get-up all the way... a word of caution... a typical mistake and how to avoid it.

The New RKC Program Minimum 71

For the most important and immediate concerns: world-class conditioning, rapid fat loss, a steel back, muscular, flexible, and resilient shoulders—and a skill base for the rest of the RKC drills... “simple and sinister” S&C routine.

The Next Step 73

What to do next, once you are rocking on the RKC Program Minimum.

Chapter 3: The RKC Rite of Passage

**The RKC Proven Formula:
Low-Rep Grinds + High-Rep Quick Lifts 77**

What is a kettlebell? . . . main benefits of kettlebell training... guidelines—choosing the correct size of kettlebell for men and women of differing backgrounds, strength and skills... do you need two kettlebells of the same size? ... understanding your goals with kettlebells—why higher numbers or heavier is not necessarily better.

A Pull and a Press—Sound Familiar?

81

A PTP format for kettlebells... the essence of minimalist training... why for most pulls are preferable to squats... pulls to build backs... a dramatic way to reduce back injuries... building stronger abs... forging a vice grip... why kettlebell presses rule... how to go from regular guy to hard guy—a set of goals... and a set of goals for women.

The Clean—Crisp Like a Punch

87

Defining the RKC Clean... difference from Olympic Clean... the six essential standards for a perfect Clean... Clean mastery, Step #1, the grip... how to avoid weakness and injury with your grip... difference between grip for the get-up and other slow lifts... fine-tuning the grip... Clean mastery, Step #2, the rack... a method for accelerating Clean mastery... the perfect girevik posture... how to properly protect your back when you clean... correct elbow placement... a “forced relaxation” technique to improve your racking... Clean mastery, Step #3, the drop... how to build confidence with the drop... fine-tuning the drop... Clean mastery, Step #4, the Clean proper... retracing the drop trajectory... a helpful visualization... fine-tuning the clean... using a wall to help your Clean technique.

The Press—for a Classic Torso

103

The five essential standards for a perfect Press... Press mastery, Step #1, the loaded Clean... the characteristics of a kettlebell pro’s Press... how to wield awesome pressing power... bracing for the weight... Prof. Verkhoshansky’s secret for improving your performance by up to 20 percent... Press mastery, Step #2, push yourself away from the kettlebell... correct shoulder and elbow placement for a maximal Press... a cool doorway drill to increase your pressing power... two prerequisites for great strength... how to avoid “leakages”... Press mastery, Step #3, the groove... the correct trajectory for the groove... key visualizations for Press success... correct hip placement for a safe Press... how to avoid leaning back in the Press... where to look when pressing, to save your neck and back... Press mastery, Step #4, use the breath to maintain tension... employing “breathing behind the shield” and other power breathing techniques... Press mastery, Step #5, lower the kettlebell... maintaining correct tension... the two ways to press for reps... the different benefits of the Clean & Press and the Military Press—and which to focus on, when... the RKC operating system for Presses.

The Snatch—for Android Work Capacity and the Pain Tolerance of an Immortal

115

The Tsar of kettlebell lifts... snatches for military and law enforcement... physical and mental benefits of the Snatch... The six essential standards for a perfect Snatch... Snatch mastery, Step #1, the High Pull... a method for accelerating the Snatch learning curve... strengthening the traps... Snatch mastery, Step #2, the lockout... the Snatch as a three-stage rocket... finessing the stages for an optimal Snatch... Snatch mastery, Step #3, don’t bang your forearm... taming the arc for the snatch... the punch-up secret... Snatch mastery, Step #4, don’t strain your shoulder or elbow... refinements... Snatch mastery, Step #5, the drop... Snatch mastery, Step #6, switch hands... the USSS Counter Assault Team 10-Minute Snatch Test... the history and philosophy of the 10-minute snatch test... exhaustion, horror, intestinal fortitude—and buckets... the RKC operating system for pulls.

Chapter 4: A Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming a Man Among Men

Have Your Borsch and Eat It Too:

The Hazards of Variety and How to Dodge Them 129

A system for the really ambitious man... the cyclical nature of complex phenomena... constructive corrections and waving the loads... the function of variety days... working your “in-between strength”... schedules for the RKC Right of Passage.

The RKC Ladder to Pressing Power 133

The intensity and volume equation... intensity benchmarks... the “ladder,” for highly effective strength building... sample laddering program for a Clean and Press... the perfect rest interval between sets... the role of density in your strength training... George Hackenschmidt’s regimen... compressed rest periods... the RKC Rite of Passage Presses schedule and progression... Pull-ups as a great addition to your Presses.

Rest Less, Snatch More 139

The kettlebell rules for conditioning... when to do your high-rep kettlebell pulls... the heavy-light-medium template... how to log your workouts... the RKC Rite of Passage Pulls schedule... warning for shoulders and elbows in your first year of kettlebelling... “pumping the injury through”—handling a tweak correctly... “kettlebell rounds”... timed sets, not reps... how to get the same results for different fitness levels with the same workout... when your spirit is tougher than your hands... back expert’s warning about posture after vigorous exercise... back bends and relaxation exercises... what to do if you have tweaked your back... from glass calm to storm—rolling the dice and the Russian science of periodization in your kettlebell training... high-intensity intervals—the new Rx for heart health.

From Boy to Man 145

Testing yourself for progress in the RKC Rite of Passage... how to best test your Clean and Press... the kettlebell Clean and Press rules... how to test your Snatch... the United States Secret Service kettlebell Snatch rules... three sample test days... the RKC Rite of Passage training plan summary... Nietzsche’s formula for success... how to measure a man’s true character.

Chapter 5: FAQ

Is kettlebell training a fad? 155

What makes the kettlebell superior to other weights and fitness equipment? 155

The kettlebell’s one-stop-shop efficiency... the AK-47 of physical training hardware.

- Should I train with the kettlebell as a stand-alone tool or mix it up with a barbell and dumbbells?** 156
The two ways to train with the Russian kettlebell.
- How can I combine kettlebell training with *Power to the People!* and *The Naked Warrior*?** 157
The two new options.
- How can I incorporate *Bullet-Proof Abs* exercises into my kettlebell regimen?** 158
- I have a bad back. Can I train with kettlebells?** 158
The top five reasons RKC kettlebell training is great for your back... strengthening the glutes to combat gluteal amnesia and a dysfunctional back... promoting hip flexor flexibility... Dr. McGill and developing back extensor endurance... bracing for spinal stability... ballistic loading to reduce the odds of arthritis.
- What diet do you recommend?** 160
- Will kettlebells help my sport-specific strength?** 160
The pros and cons of sports-specific training... the kettlebell “what-the-hell effect” for improving at things you have not practiced... professional powerlifting and marathon running success stories... how to truly excel at a certain exercise... when to do “special strength” training... customized for what?... beware the moonshine—the dangers of home-brewed coaching.
- Why are your exercise descriptions so detailed?**
Come on, kettlebells are not rocket science! 61
Reverse-engineering what the greats do naturally... learning how to move like the elite... refining the basics.
- Can I substitute the . . . with the . . . ?** 161
- Once I have put up the RKC Rite of Passage numbers, where do I go next?** 162
- If Russian stuff is so tough, why did the USSR lose the Cold War** 162
“Russian squirrel pack kills dog”—a lesson for the well-fed.

Chapter 6: The Making of a Kettlebell

The Making of a Kettlebell	165
The kettlebell pattern... pressing the kettlebell mold... molding the BEAST... food for the fiery furnace... crucible for a hot kettlebell... pouring the kettlebell molds... breaking open the kettlebell molds... shaking out the kettlebell... hammer and kettlebell... sandblasting the kettlebell... grinding the kettlebell.	
About the Author	172
Index	173



FOREWORD BY DAN JOHN

“DO THIS!”

Within minutes of meeting Pavel Tsatsouline for the first time, I was being split fore and aft and being told to tighten my hip as Pavel slapped it. I was stiff in the hip flexors and, well, Pavel was going to do his best to fix it. All I know is that I came away from our first meeting with flexible hips, a plan for lifting for the next year, and, most important, a great respect for Pavel Tsatsouline. Since meeting Pavel, I have seen literally hundreds of his posts on the Internet, read all of his books (although, to the teacher in me, "textbooks" seems more correct), and watched his library of DVDs. Whenever I review his work, one concept comes into my head: Do This!

The greatest challenge in fitness, health, life performance, and sports is walking the narrow balance beam between too much variety and no variety. You know, I love Thanksgiving dinner, but not every day. One day, someone might find the perfect diet with one superfood, but I doubt many people—short of living on a desert island—would follow this diet for very long. Pavel Tsatsouline hit the mark perfectly in his book *Power to the People!*

Power to the People! had all the earmarks of a perfect program: Do This. And, "this" was deadlifts and side presses. He offered suggestions for further variation, but, honestly, one could have a successful career with just those two lifts. I have it on good authority—several drinks at a bar with these throwers—that many world-ranked track and field throwers are currently doing JUST that workout.

So, you may well ask, why do we need another kettlebell book? Where are the mad throngs of crazed health enthusiasts demanding *Enter the Kettlebell!*? You know what? They are everywhere! Early in *Enter the Kettlebell!* Pavel quotes J.M. Martin, who writes, "I was fine doing a *Power to the People!* workout because I knew exactly what to do. The book broke it down idiot proof for me and it worked. I made enormous gains. Well, now I have a kettlebell and I want to make a set-in-stone path to follow." Martin echoes what I have heard from legions of kettlebell enthusiasts: "What do I do? I've got the book/video/DVD/workshop/seminar/article . . . now how do I do 'what' when?"

Enter the Kettlebell!

Personally, the RKC Program Minimum was enough for me. "Here you go . . . DO THIS!" could be the subtitle for the first few chapters. Two exercises. Each exercise twice a week. A push and a pull (holy Power to the People!, Batman). For the majority of kettlebell users, here you go . . . a plan to follow.

Pavel, however, delivers more. The chapter on the "Rite of Passage" gives us a step-by-step approach to literally climbing the ladder of kettlebell exercises. Moreover, the section "The Hazards of Variety and How to Dodge Them" is a century of knowledge compressed into a few pages. If you liked the "old school" approach, open your eyes and see the classic training methods from a kettlebell perspective.

Clearly, this book is not the end point. Pavel notes, "I never stop polishing my training system, which is why you will find some inconsistencies between *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* and *Enter the Kettlebell!* The latter book takes precedence. At the RKC, we never rest."

I have some simple advice for you:

Do this.



Dan John is your typical coach. A Fulbright Scholar to Egypt, Dan has advanced degrees in history and religious education. He has traveled the world dealing with parasites, customs officials and a terrible accent in every language he has learned...so much so, that both Turkish and Hebrew speakers have asked him to stop speaking their language.

When not working as a professor of religious studies, Dan is a full-time strength coach and Head Track and Field coach at Juan Diego Catholic High School in Draper, Utah. Dan has multiple national and state championships in the discus, Olympic lifting, Highland Games and the Weight Pentathlon.

Dan John is the author of two instructional DVDs, *Carried Away*, on carrying, dragging and pulling objects for strength and conditioning, and *From the Ground Up*, that teaches weightlifting fundamentals quickly and correctly, the old-school way. Both DVDs are available at www.crossfitnorcal.com/catalog/index.php. Dan also maintains the "world's largest" free website dedicated to lifting and throwing stuff at www.danjohn.org/coach.

PREFACE

A Step to the Left and I Shoot

Remember Robin Williams' Soviet defector character in *Moscow on the Hudson*? The recovering Commie just wanted to buy some coffee. In the USSR he had had two choices: 'We have coffee' or, more likely, "We are out of coffee." When he saw the variety of products in the coffee aisle of a New York City supermarket, he nearly had a nervous breakdown.

The mind-boggling diversity of kettlebell exercises and applications can make the aspiring kettlebeller feel like the Russkie defector. The freestyle training program in my book *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* kicked off a tyranny of kettlebell choices that has continued with the smorgasbord of exercises on my DVDs and those made by my senior instructors.

"Maybe someone can help," asked Comrade J.M. Martin in a thread titled "Kettlebell Confused" on our forum. "I have read all I can find on kettlebells and have to say I am at loss as to making a program. I was fine doing a *Power to the People!* workout because I knew exactly what to do. The book broke it down idiot proof for me and it worked. I made enormous gains. Well now I have a kettlebell and I want to make a set in stone path to follow. . . ."



Enter the Kettlebell! is your "set in stone path," the ruthlessly efficient *Power to the People!* for kettlebells. A step to the left and I shoot.

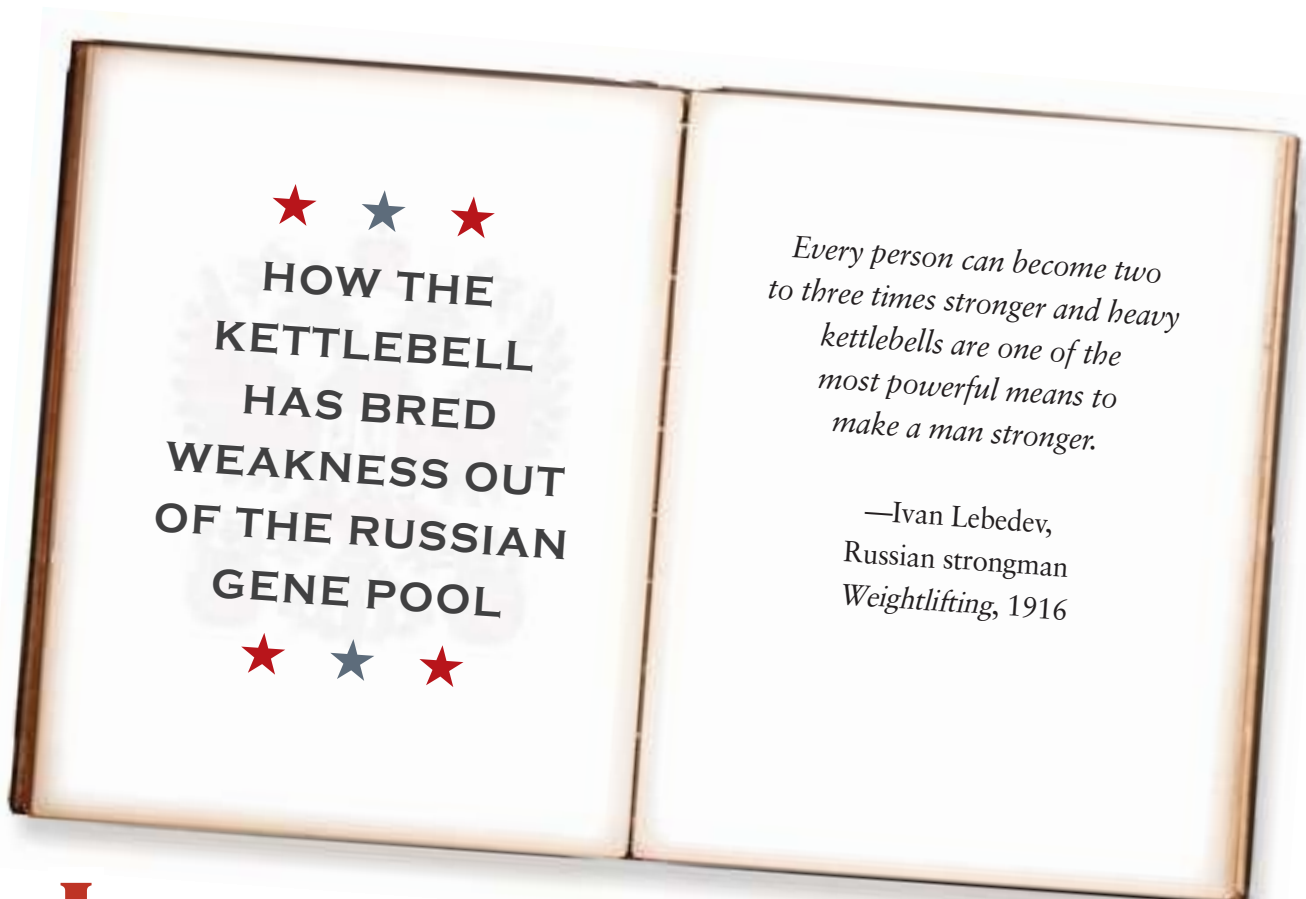
Russian kettlebell power to you!

Pavel



INTRODUCTION

When We Say “Strength,” We Mean “Kettlebell.” When We Say “Kettlebell,” We Mean “Strength.”



If Charles Atlas were Russian, he could have told a different story . . .

Sergey Mishin was a heavy, slow, decidedly nonathletic kid. He picked up his first kettlebell, a 53-pounder, at 17 and was dismayed when he could not lift it with either arm. Undeterred by his weakness, Mishin found a plumbing pipe, hammered its middle flat so it would hold the kettlebell handle in place, and started jerking the kettlebell with two hands, like a barbell. The year was 1975. Two years later, Mishin could press a 70-pounder, which he had found abandoned in a park after a festival held on Railroad Worker Day, 30 times with each arm.

Mishin kept kettlebelling in the army, and when he was discharged he bragged to a friend that he would make a Master of Sports national ranking in the first kettlebell lifting competition he entered. And he did!



The cover of a 1915 issue of *Hercules*, Tsarist Russia's strength magazine.

Sergey lost more than 100 pounds; became fast, wiry. And went on to become the number-one kettlebell lifter in the world—170 jerks with a pair of 70-pound kettlebells in 10 minutes!—and Russia's sport legend. The president of Russia awarded Mishin a medal "For Accomplishments for the Benefit of the Motherland." (II degree).

In Russia kettlebells are a matter of national pride and a symbol of strength. In the olden days, any strongman or weightlifter was referred to as a *girevik*, or "kettlebell man." Steeled by their kettlebells, generation after generation of Russian boys has turned to men. A century before Mishin, another young boy, Pyotr Kryloff, found kettlebells at a butcher's shop. It was love at first sight. Pyotr never parted with his kettlebells, and when he became a merchant marine he took them with him around the world. Eventually the kettlebell fanatic became a circus strongman and performed until he was 60. The public called him the "King of Kettlebells." Kryloff could cross himself in the Russian Orthodox manner with

a 70-pound kettlebell, military pressed the same kettlebell with one arm 88 times, and juggled *three* of them at once! Pyotr applied his kettlebell power to all sorts of feats. He broke stones with his fist, bent coins, made "ties" and "bracelets" out of strips of iron, broke horseshoes, jerked a "barbell" with two beefy soldiers sitting inside two hollow spheres, and set a few world weightlifting records.

Pyotr Kryloff, "the King of Kettlebells," could cross himself in the Russian Orthodox manner with a 70-pound kettlebell, military pressed the same kettlebell with one arm 88 times, and juggled three of them at once!



Enter “Heavy Athletics”

“It can be said with a good deal of certainty that Russian weightlifting was born and grew thanks to the devotees of the kettlebell sport,” stated Weightlifting Masters World Champion Prof. L. Dvorkin. Indeed, it was the father of kettlebells, Dr. Vladislav Krayevskiy, who coined the term “heavy athletics” (*tyazholaya atletika*), the name for the sport of Olympic weightlifting in today’s Russia.

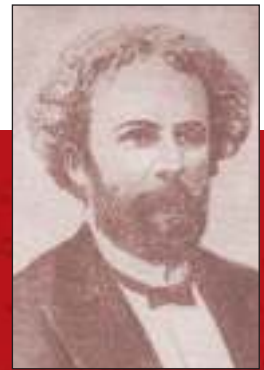
The Red Army and the kettlebell are inseparable. Every Russian military unit has a gym called “the courage corner.” Every courage corner is equipped with kettlebells. While other countries waste time testing their troopers with push-ups, Russia tests repetition kettlebell snatches with a 53-pound kettlebell. “The rank and file of the Red Army was magnificent from a physical point of view,” marveled Lt. Gen. Giffard Martel, chief of the British military mission to the USSR during World War II. “Much of the equipment we carry on vehicles accompanying the infantry is carried on the man’s back in Russia. The Russians seem capable of carrying these great loads. They are exceptionally tough.”

Law enforcement tactical teams—even the Russian federal tax police, who are handier with firearms than with calculators—also make kettlebells their strength training tool of choice. In the last days of the Soviet empire, the prison system was plagued with riots and hostage situations. Interior ministry troops were called in to suppress the riots. They did the job, but finesse was sure lacking. For instance, in 1986 they stormed a prison camp and burned it to the ground in the process of ruthlessly suppressing the riot.

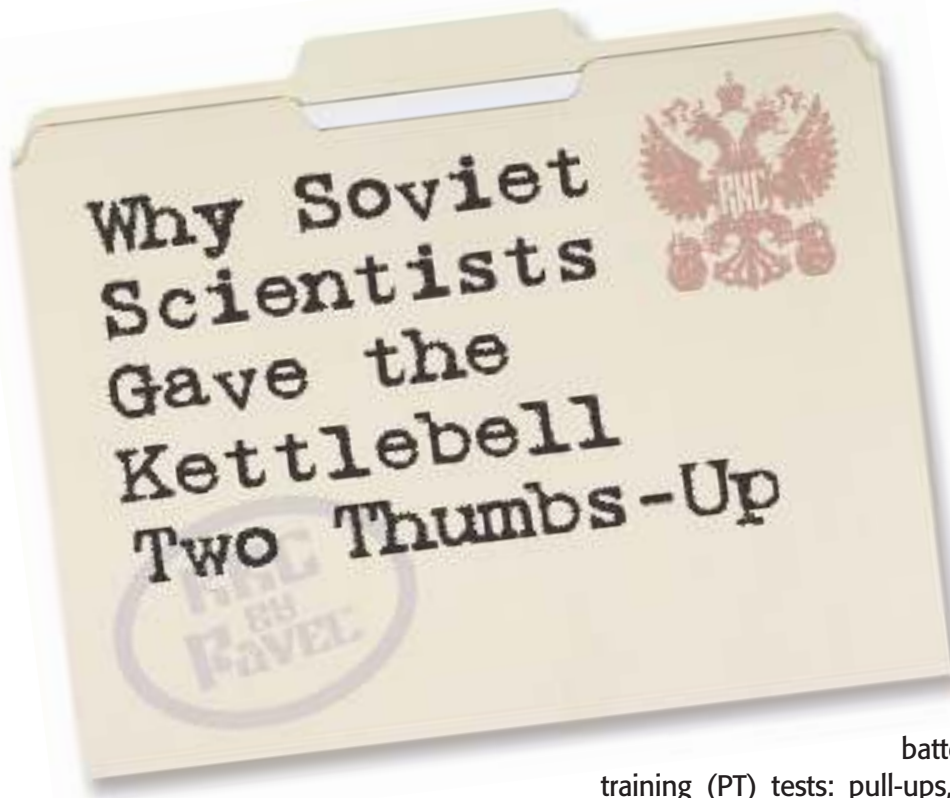
In 1991 the interior ministry formed special tactical teams for every administrative prison district. Their mission: hostage rescue, riot suppression, search and arrest of escaped criminals. Since that memorable year when the USSR fell apart, these TAC teams have earned their keep on many occasions, in harsh Russian prisons and in Chechnya.

Russian federal prison SWAT teams are manned with former military special operators, paras, and vets of other elite services; each one had to compete against nine or more rival applicants to make the team. The selection process is similar to that of the army Spetsnaz. Here is what the trooper has to do back-to-back: a 10K forced march in full kit, an obstacle course and rappelling, plus another 10K run. A cherry on the top when you are beyond smoked is a 12-minute full-contact sparring session—with fresh opponents rotating in every three minutes. Once on the team, operators aggressively compete against their colleagues in the frequently held law enforcement sports events. Their specialties: hand-to-hand combat and the kettlebell sport. A matter of specificity and pride.

It is hard to understand the logic of governments—both Russian and American—that encourage inmates to strength train, but Russian prisoners lift kettlebells as well. You may have seen the black-and-white archive footage in a History Channel documentary about Russian organized crime—a wiry prisoner doing kettlebell swings, flips, and side presses. Some Russian prisons even host kettlebell competitions for the inmates! Go figure. Perhaps the law enforcement likes a challenge.



Dr. Krayevskiy, the father of kettlebells.



In the 20th century, Soviet science validated what Russian hard men had known for centuries: kettlebell lifting is one of the best tools for all-around physical development.

Voropayev (1983) observed two groups of college students over a period of a few years. To gauge their performance, he used a standard battery of the armed forces physical training (PT) tests: pull-ups, a standing broad jump, a 100-meter sprint, and a 1K run. The control group followed the typical university PT program, which was military oriented and emphasized the above exercises. The experimental group just lifted kettlebells. In spite of the lack of practice on the tested drills, the kettlebell group showed better scores in every one of them!

Vinogradov and Lukyanov (1986) found a very high correlation between the results posted in a kettlebell lifting competition and in a great range of dissimilar tests: strength, measured with the three powerlifts and grip strength; strength endurance, measured with pull-ups and parallel bar dips; general endurance, determined by a 1K run; and work capacity and balance, measured with special tests.

Lopatin (2000) found a positive correlation between soldiers' kettlebell sport ranking and their obstacle course performance.

Kettlebells improve coordination and agility (Luchkin, 1947; Laputin, 1973).

Kettlebells develop professional applied qualities and general physical preparedness (Zikov, 1986; Griban, 1990).

Kettlebells are highly effective for building strength.

The official Soviet armed forces strength training manual approved by the ministry of defense (Burkov & Nikityuk, 1985) declared kettlebell training to be "one of the most effective means of strength development," representing "a new era in the development of human strength-potential."

Kettlebell lifting is great for your heart.

Siberian scientist Shevtsova (1993) verified what is obvious to any girevik. She studied 75 gireviks with three to five years of experience and recorded a long-term decrease in the heart rate and the blood pressure. The kettlebellers had what Russians call “a cosmonaut’s blood pressure”: 110/70 in the summer and 114/74 in the winter. They clocked an average resting heart rate of 56 beats per minute. The heart rate took a dive not just at rest, but also during and after exercise. And the time it took the heart to slow down back to normal, after exercise, also decreased. Besides, the experienced gireviks’ systems had also adapted to be better “primed” and ready for upcoming action.

Properly used, kettlebells are surprisingly safe.

Only 8.8 percent of top Russian gireviks, members of the Russian National Team and regional teams, reported injuries in training or competition (Voropayev, 1997). A remarkably low number, especially if you consider that these are elite athletes who push their bodies over the edge.

Kettlebell training improves body composition.

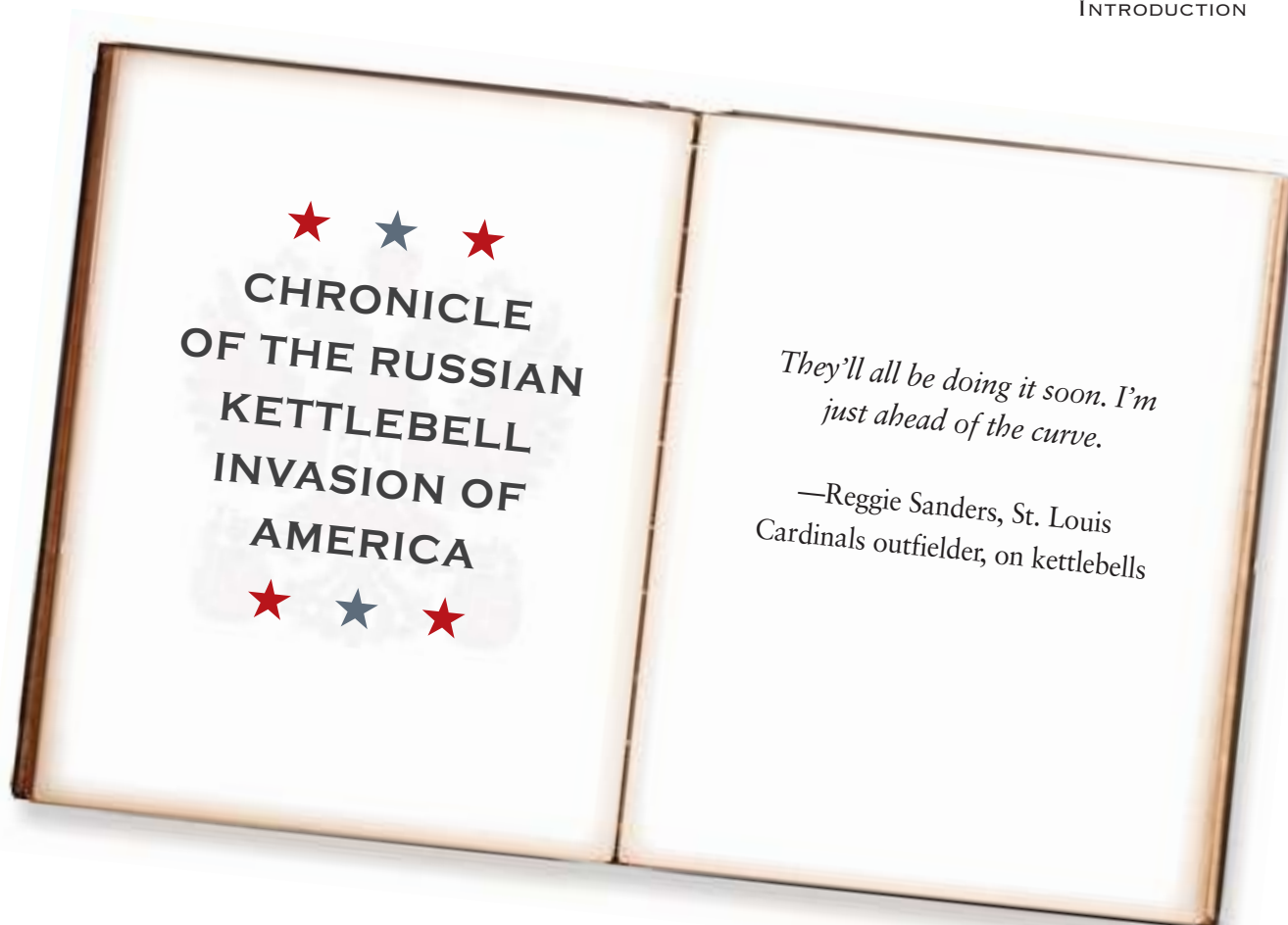
According to Voropayev (1997), who studied top Russian kettlebell lifters, 21.2 percent increased their bodyweight since taking up kettlebelling, and 21.2 percent (the exact same percentage, not a typo), mostly heavyweights, decreased it. Another study of elite gireviks revealed a consistently low body fat (Gomonov, 1998).

“A girevik is characterized by a balanced development of all organs and musculature with significant hypertrophy of the muscles of the shoulder girdle.” (Rasskazov, 1993).

“A girevik (legendary strongman Eugene Sandow pictured) is characterized by a balanced development of all organs and musculature with significant hypertrophy of the muscles of the shoulder girdle.”—(Rasskazov, 1993)







American iron men of old knew the value of kettlebells. You can see a pair in the training “dungeon” of one of the greatest deadlifters of all time, Tennessee farmer Bob Peoples, who pulled more than 700 pounds weighing a buck eighty before steroids and supportive gear. Sig Klein was a big proponent of kettlebells. I bought a pair of antique 1917 American kettlebells (they look like miniature Weber grills) from a 70-year-old friend, a “once a lifter, always a lifter” who still does good mornings with 405 pounds.

Then America got prosperous and forgot its rugged frontier past. Kettlebells went the way of the California gold prospectors and the gunslingers of the Old West. The kettlebell would have remained but a chapter in manly American history if not for my friend Marty Gallagher, former Coach, Powerlifting Team USA.

Marty and I were enjoying steaks in his backyard in an undisclosed location on the East Coast. We were trading old war stories over a mouthful of Mennonite-raised beef. Marty told me about Ed Coan, Kirk Karwoski, and other champions he had coached. I told him about kettlebells.

Gallagher thoughtfully finished chewing his steak and suggested, “Why don’t you write an article for *MILO*?” You know, the magazine for crazy guys who bend nails and lift rocks.

I said, “Marty, you don’t get it, this is the most painful workout you could imagine, who would want to do it or even read about it?” Earlier I had made the mistake of explaining a Russian slur, the “collective farmer,” to Marty. He used it on me and told me that I did not understand Americans.

The subversive *Vodka, Pickle Juice, Kettlebell Lifting, and Other Russian Pastimes* was published in 1998. The article was extremely well received by the most ruthless critics in the strength world. I started getting mail from guys with busted noses, cauliflower ears, scars, or at least Hells Angels tattoos. Incredulous, I told my friend and editor John Du Cane about it. He thought for a minute and said: “Let’s do it! I’ll make kettlebells and you teach people how to use them.”

Behind John’s reticent Cambridge demeanor is the heart of an American pioneer. A Brit who grew up in Africa, John drove from England to India—through Pakistan and Afghanistan—and lived for a few years in a Yoga community. He built his publishing company in the U.S. while driving a limousine to make ends meet. Fledgling Dragon Door Publications demanded undivided attention and John could not afford “wasting” his time on sleep. Du Cane took naps in the limo while waiting for his customers and used every spare minute to build his American Dream.

When presented with a new opportunity this rugged, self-reliant individual risked everything he had accomplished in his hard years as an entrepreneur publisher and decided to invest in manufacturing and promoting Russian kettlebells. Hindsight is always 20/20 and today it is obvious to anyone that the kettlebell is a winner. But that was not the case back then. “A cannon ball with a handle? Are you out of your mind?!”

2001 was the year of the kettlebell. Dragon Door published *The Russian Kettlebell Challenge* and forged the first US made Russian style cast iron kettlebell. RKC, the first kettlebell instructor course on American soil, also kicked off in 2001. Given the kettlebell’s harsh reputation, most of my early students looked like they came from the federal witness protection program. People often ask if Steve Maxwell and I are brothers. Steve, I love you, man, but I don’t think it’s a compliment for either of us.



Times change. Hard living Comrades remain the loyal core of ‘the Party’. But now they have to begrudgingly share the Russian kettlebell with Hollywood movie stars and other unlikely kettlebellers. Fed up with the sissified mainstream fitness advice, smart folks go hardcore. In 2002 our Russian kettlebell made it into the *Rolling Stone's* exclusive Hot List as ‘the Hot Weight’. In 2004 Dr. Randall Strossen, one of the most respected names in the strength world, stated, “In our eyes, Pavel Tsatsouline will always reign as the modern king of kettlebells since it was he who popularized them to the point where you could almost find a country filled with his converts...”

CHAPTER I

Enter the Kettlebell!



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