

Strength training



Dr Jason Lake in his Chichester University research lab

Kettlebells prove their worth at elite level

StrongFirst's methodology has already shown its worth at elite level, with a number of current and former professionals reporting significant improvements in close-season conditioning, cardiovascular strength and in rehabilitation. "Kettlebells are less complex and far more versatile than Olympic lifting and players often see better results in quicker time," explains Adrian Cradock, an Irish sports rehabilitation specialist who has worked closely with the Irish national squad.

"My work with Damien Brown has shown some impressive results when applying swings and the get-up as part of his off-season conditioning," he explains.



Damian Browne (right)

"When used in the correct way, kettlebells replicate the cardiovascular levels required in competition. An athlete can complete a high volume of exercises due to the relative low weight of the kettlebell, so, for players recovering from injuries which prevent them running, they're able to build up high levels of cardiovascular strength while not exacerbating an injury." The improvements to hip, lower back and glute strength and mobility through applying StrongFirst principles have also resulted in an improvement in sprint capacity. "Correct use of the hips and core, without overloading the shoulders, allow players to build excellent foundations in lower back and core strength, which can reduce injury, help rehabilitation and allow players better prepare in pre-season."

Correct Kettlebell practice 'key to training gains'

The future of kettlebell training is bright; thanks to a series of university research trials that prove the significant strength benefits of correct kettlebell practice. Undertaken at the University of Chichester by Dr Jason Lake, lecturer in biomechanics, the kettlebell has finally been put through its paces under laboratory conditions to assess the performance and functionality of the kettlebell swing.

"Some in the industry still hold the belief that kettlebell training offers no improvement in strength over and above what can be achieved with traditional training methods," says Lake. "We knew how effective kettlebells can be but we had to prove it." The UK site is a frontrunner in the fledgling field of kettlebell research and Lake's recent series of studies and further trials are the first of their kind in the English-speaking world.

Only Dr Stuart McGill, Professor of spine biomechanics at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, has trialled kettlebells in research prior to this. Lake's first round of study looked at the mechanical demands of the kettlebell swing - work that has led to another two rounds of assessment - which give weight to the arguments of training experts who believe proper kettlebell training is being largely neglected. Lake's second study compared the effects of using the kettlebell swing to improve vertical jump height and maximum strength with the traditional approach of jumping with a loaded barbell.

Findings revealed that six weeks of twice-weekly swing exercise sessions, when subjects performed 12 rounds of 30 seconds of swing exercise alternating with 30 seconds of rest, improved maximum strength by 12% and vertical jump height by 15%.

"After 12 seasons as a professional rugby player in the Magners League, English Premiership and French Top 14, I thought I'd seen and experienced every different type of training session/ method, but working with Adrian banished those thoughts. Our sessions were innovative, demanding and refreshing. His knowledge of all aspects of strength and conditioning is top class. If you're striving to take your training to a different level and work with someone at the top of his profession, train with Adrian."

Damian Brown, Former Leinster Lock

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The crowned 'King of Kettlebells'

He's one of the world's most influential and respected fitness gurus, has penned numerous best-selling fitness titles and is almost solely responsible (along with John Du Cane) for the emergence of kettlebell training in the West. Pavel Tsatsouline is a force to be reckoned with in the US and is idolised by his peers in the former Soviet states.

The launch of StrongFirst in the US last year (2012), the latest business venture by the Minsk- (Belarus) born former physical trainer for the elite Soviet special force, has set in motion steps to finally see that Pavel attains the recognition he deserves on our shores, which, despite being reportedly the second largest fitness market in the world, he is still to visit. Pavel is fiercely proud of his roots and his Russian heritage, where he was brought up in an environment where strength was more than just a fitness goal. "The Soviet Union was a place where strength was highly respected. Every boy wanted to be strong," Pavel

reveals. "My father's grandfather, after whom I was named, could pick up the front of a tractor. My grandmother would casually run up several floors with two heavy suitcases when she was 70 years old. Weakness was embarrassing."

His father, Vladimir, is one of his biggest inspirations: "He is a lifelong athlete who has trained and competed in a variety of sports. He's 76 now. About five years ago he took up powerlifting and today he holds several American deadlift records in his age group. Several months ago he pulled 407 in the 198-pound classes, with no belt or other supportive gear."

In 2001, Pavel was voted a 'Hot Trainer' by Rolling Stone magazine and has authored several books on stretching and strength training, published by Dragon Door (owned by John Du Cane), a company with which he's enjoyed a long association since the two combined in 2001 to establish the Russian Kettlebell Challenge (RKC), which is an advanced kettlebell training certification.

Kettlebells are now commonplace in every gym in the UK, classes are growing in popularity and clinical research is finally seeing the light of day. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for Pavel's influence and desire to spread the word about the virtues of kettlebell training, which despite growing appeal in the UK is still largely rooted in ignorance,



Pavel observing at the StrongFirst Italy instructor certification course



Pavel Tsatsouline

Kettlebell instructor certification course marks StrongFirst UK debut

StrongFirst is launching in the UK with its first certification course for kettlebells, held from 5 to 7 July at Harlow Leisurezone.

Run to exacting standards, the three-day SFG Kettlebell Instructor Level I course will entitle successful participants to become certified StrongFirst kettlebell instructors, in line with the company's strategy to develop a UK-wide instructor network. This event is the first of two instructor certifications held this year.

especially concerning the correct way to utilise them to optimise results. "Properly used, kettlebells lay a foundation for healthy and powerful movement," says Pavel. "Hips become mobile, spine stable, shoulders mobile and stable. The body becomes more symmetrical and resilient. You start to move like an athlete and see dramatic changes in your body composition. "Kettlebells are compact, inexpensive, virtually indestructible and can be used anywhere."

For more information on StrongFirst or to learn more about how kettlebell training could benefit your club, contact James Breese, StrongFirst UK

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