



# Kettlebell Background, Modern History and Styles

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# Introduction

Training with kettlebells is now commonplace. Almost every gym will have a set. Kettlebells are useful tools with which to work on every component of fitness; strength, endurance, cardiovascular fitness, speed and mobility. But where did they originate from? Why are there different shapes available? and why do two people doing the same exercise, seem to use different techniques?

The following presentation will look at each of these questions in turn so that you can understand better, the concepts behind kettlebell training

# Early origins

Kettlebell shaped objects made of metal or stone have been used across Europe and Asia for hundreds of years. Chinese Shaolin Monks used stone padlocks in a similar way to Kettlebells and called this type of training 'Shi-SuoGuong' (The Art of Stone Padlock). In Scotland, similar stones were also used for local strength competitions

The first Russian kettlebell that looked similar to what we use today appeared around 350 years ago. They were used as counterweights in markets in order to weigh out dried goods. The word for kettlebell (girya) first appeared in a Russian dictionary in 1704

The Russians measured weight in 'poods'. 1 pood equals 16.38kgs. Hence, traditionally most kettlebell weights are measured in multiples of 4kgs. However, modern kettlebells often now come in multiples of 2kgs to offer greater progression possibilities

# Early origins cont.

The St. Petersburg Amateur Weightlifting Society was founded in 1885 by Dr. Vladislav Krayevsky and was considered the 'birth of weightlifting'. Krayevsky wrote 'The Development of Physical Strength with Kettlebells and Without Kettlebells' and pioneered kettlebell training

In 1948 kettlebell lifting became the USSR's national sport and in 1985 national rules, regulations and weight categories were finalised, with the first national championship taking place in November of that year

The sport of weightlifting is called Girevoy Sport or GS for short



# Modern history

The popularity of kettlebell training in the West is attributed to two main characters; Pavel Tsatsouline and Valery Fedorenko – Two Russians who emigrated to the US and brought with them two differing styles of kettlebell technique

In 1998 Pavel Tsatsouline published an article entitled ‘Vodka, pickle juice, kettlebell lifting and other Russian pastimes’ in MILO, an American strength training magazine. Pavel went on to found the ‘Russian Kettlebell Challenge’ (RKC) in 2001, which promoted ‘hardstyle’ kettlebell training methods. Today, Pavel is the founder of Strongfirst, the leading hardstyle kettlebell training advocate

In 1999 Valery Fedorenko introduced Girevoy Sport to the US. This became known as ‘softstyle/fluidstyle’ to differentiate it from Pavel’s hardstyle. Valery founded the World Kettlebell Club in 2006. The WKC hold competitions around the world

Kettlebells were introduced to the UK around 1998 and were initially used by the military, special forces and the police in training

# Hardstyle

In the 1970's a style of hand-to-hand style karate-like combat was taught to Russian Special Forces. Hardstyle kettlebell training was used to support this martial art. Both the martial art, and hardstyle kettlebell training share the concept of 'kime' (focused energy) – the type of energy used in a well executed swing or punch

Hardstyle kettlebell lifting is focused on power production. It is not about power conservation or efficiency. The body is brought to a state of high tension, so that high force can be produced during the movement, before the body is then relaxed. For that reason, it appears that every exercise is completed 'maximally', regardless of the weight. The tension created in the body should be appropriate to the exercise and it is important to remember that the tension is not held permanently

Hardstyle kettlebell exercises predominantly use the alactic acid system to create the energy required to move

# Hardstyle cont.

Tension in the body is created a number of ways, 2 of which are:

- Irradiation – where a tensing muscle radiates strength to the adjacent muscles. (Try lightly squeezing your hand into a fist, then progressively increase the strength of the squeeze and feel which other muscles are contracting)
- Breath holding – Inflating your lungs and then compressing these against your core muscles and diaphragm will add considerable stability to your trunk

The idea being that a strong stable trunk provides a solid base for force production from the limbs, as minimal force is dissipated into a soft core

# Hardstyle principles

The original hardstyle (RKC) principles included the following statements:

1. Compress the muscles. Because muscles produce force by tensing. Maximise the tension
2. Compress the joints. Because a loose joint absorbs the force meant to go elsewhere; it 'leaks' power and is easily injured
3. Compress the breath. Because a slack waist dissipates force like Jell-o. Because high intra-abdominal pressure increases strength
4. Compress the ground. To maximize stability and to take advantage of the reactive forces
5. Compress the focus. Direct the force precisely to minimise losses. 'Coordination of movement is getting rid of excessive degrees of freedom in different joints...'

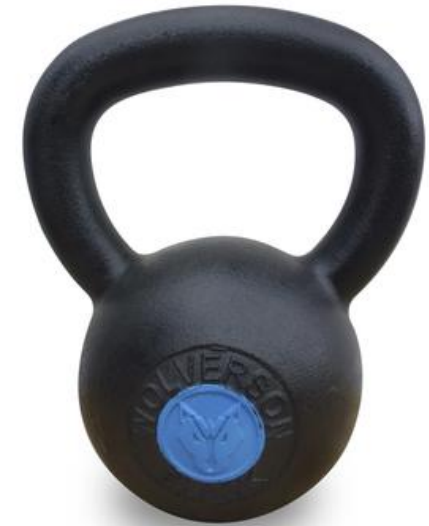


# Hardstyle movements

Hardstyle kettlebell movements fall into two general categories:

- Grinds – Exercises that are performed at a slower, controlled pace and require time under tension
- Ballistics – Exercises that use the solid base that high tension gives, in order to move explosively

Due to the nature of these movements, kettlebells used for this lifting are generally of the flared handle, cast iron type, as they allow more convenient hand grips



# Girevoy sport (softstyle/fluidstyle)

Though many of the movements used in GS look similar to those used in hardstyle, there are some subtle differences

GS is all about strength endurance, relaxation and energy conservation/efficiency. With each repetition, only the minimal amount of force should be used, so that each rep has a lower metabolic cost. This means that more reps can be completed

With a far higher rep count, GS workouts are great metabolic conditioners. They use a higher proportion of energy derived from aerobic pathways than hardstyle

In Girevoy Sport competitions, there are three exercises performed: Longcycle (clean and jerk), snatch, and jerk. These can be completed individually, or snatch and jerk can be put into one routine called 'biathlon'. The exercises are then performed for 5 or 10 minutes AMRAP (As Many Reps As Possible). Pacing is all-important!

## GS cont.

To stay as efficient as possible, the girevik (kettlebell lifter) should use full, relaxed breathing rather than the creation of tension. This allows the parasympathetic nervous system to help keep heart rate lower, and thus more reps can be completed at a faster pace. An experienced girevik's pace of lifting will be metronomic and measured against previous performances

## GS cont.

GS style kettlebell training certainly develops mental resilience! It is also one of the few strength sports where amateurs can make direct comparisons with elite athletes – as kettlebell weights are in general light enough that all lifters can complete at least one repetition. Weights used are usually 16kg, 24kg and 32 kg – though many governing body's are now using the in-between weights also.

GS style kettlebells are consistent in shape and dimensions, meaning that movement patterns do not need to be re-learned when changing the weights used. They are also colour coded for ease of recognition



# GS competition

There are a number of governing body's that promote kettlebell sport competitions. In the UK, there are also informal, online kettlebell competitions. Participating in these competitions is a great way to get feedback from your peers in the sport of kettlebells!

<https://www.facebook.com/GrassrootsKettlebells/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/TOKCC/>

You can also find an International Kettlebell and Fitness Federation (IKFF) rules and ranking table within this course so that you can gauge your own performance and familiarise yourself with the rules of competition

# Crossfit style

The crossfit style of kettlebell training tends to be a hybrid of both hardstyle and GS. Some Crossfit lifts also have adjusted movement patterns to align with fundamental Crossfit principles. One such example is the 'American swing'. The American swing finishing position is overhead – making full use of the movement available. There are pro's and cons to these adjustments and it is worth investigating these movements to decide for yourself whether they are for you or not!

# Kettlebell anatomy

