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Kettle bell (KB) training has recently emerged as a popular form of weight training in the fitness community, but it has a history that spans many decades among track athletes and Olympic weightlifters. Kettle bell training has been used with the throwing events at Indiana University (IU) for a number of years. A series of dynamic, multi joint exercises are used with the throwers to develop a throwing specific work capacity. It is critical to identify when and why this training should be used, understand the proper technique for the movements, and then outline how the training protocol is carried out. As with any training, the athlete should first be carefully evaluated to ensure that whatever training method used is appropriate and safe for that athlete.

The periodization model used at IU with the track athletes begins in September with a four week period of general physical preparation (GPP). This is followed by a six strength phase and a four week power phase. A long in season training plan is implemented in conjunction with the indoor and outdoor season. This is followed up by a 3 week transition phase and an eight week off season phase focusing largely on work capacity and strength.

The KB work is performed largely during the transition phase, the off season training cycle, and during the GPP phase. It is during these phases that work capacity takes some precedence. Work capacity provides the necessary building blocks to handle greater volume and higher intensities throughout the yearly training cycle. There are many ways to develop work capacity. KB training is a viable work capacity tool for the thrower. It provides the means to train using high volumes while effectively taxing the nervous system, developing overall strength, functionally training the abdominals and low back, and provides phenomenal mobility and flexibility throughout the lower extremities and shoulder complex.

The athlete begins by first learning proper technique for five KB exercises. Three to five sets of each exercise are carried out at 6-10 reps per set. The first exercise is a two hand high pull. The KB is resting on the ground, between the athlete's legs. The high pull is initiated with the bottom position of the squat while grasping the KB, the athlete keeps his chest up and back flat, actively extending the legs and hips, followed by an upright rowing motion of the arms. The KB is immediately returned to the ground in the squatting fashion as the athlete proceeds to the next repetition of the set.

The next exercise is a two arm swing. The starting position is the same as on the high pull. The athlete aggressively extends the legs and hips in the same manner. Instead of finishing the movement with a pulling motion, the KB is driven away from the body until the arms are fully extended and are parallel to the ground. The athlete then returns the KB to the starting position by returning back to the squatting position as the next rep is initiated.

The third exercise is a one arm high pull. The technique is the same as the two arm high pull except, as the name suggests, the high pull is carried out using one arm at a time.

The fourth movement is a one arm swing. The athlete begins in the same squatting position holding the KB with the right hand, palm facing the left leg. The legs and hips are aggressively extended. As the KB is driven to right arms length away from the body, the athlete switches hands, grabbing the KB with the left hand. The KB is then returned to the squatting position with the KB fixed in the left hand with the palm facing the right leg. The next rep is immediately carried out with the left hand, and the KB changes hands with each rep.

The final exercise is a one arm squat to press. The KB is supported on the right shoulder while being held with the right hand. Standing erect, the athlete proceeds to descend into the squat, and as the athlete aggressively stands up from the squat, they drive the bell overhead to arms length. The bell is returned to the shoulder as the athlete returns into the bottom of the squat for the next rep.

As with any training, safety is of utmost priority. Before beginning this training, a great deal of time is spent ensuring that the athlete has the core stability, general strength, mobility, and flexibility to effectively carry out the KB training. This is accomplished using a great deal of bodyweight exercise, medicine ball exercise, very general strength training, and extensive core work. Once the athlete is physically prepared to carry out KB exercise, technique and safety are never sacrificed in the name of using a particular weight or for the sake of carrying out a planned workout. Furthermore, onlookers should not stand in front of the athlete while carrying out the swinging exercises. Also, the athlete should be kept under the trained, watchful eye of the coach to ensure that the back is kept in a fixed, straight position, and that proper technique is used for each movement.

The kettle bell has a rich history that crosses many cultural and athletic barriers. It is a fantastic training tool, especially for the thrower. It is difficult to compete with the kettle bell's effectiveness in developing work capacity, general strength, neurological adaptation, core strength and stability, and functional flexibility. Most importantly...anyone that has trained with a kettle bell will tell you that it is a fun, exciting, dynamic form of training.