

# The History of *Kettlebells*

The resurrection of a great training tool

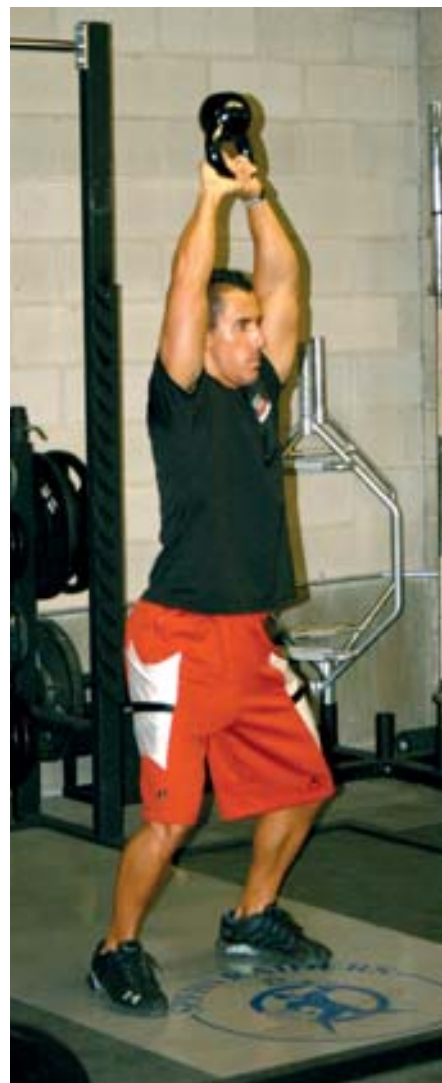
**B**FS is a company founded on basic principles that have proven successful in training young athletes for over 30 years. With such a tradition, we are naturally skeptical when a new product comes along that promises to give athletes an edge. In fact, many of the new items in our catalog are

simply improvements over older products, such as better barbells, medicine balls, power racks and lifting platforms. And one of our new products is not so much making a debut as it is making a reappearance after having been forgotten by the strength coaching community for several decades: kettlebells.

Unlike a dumbbell, which has two weights on each side of a single handle, the kettlebell has a U-shaped handle attached to a single round weight that looks like an old-style cannonball. The thick handle (usually thicker than on standard dumbbells) is necessary to provide a secure hold. Having the handle



Because the handle is positioned farther from the center of mass of the weight than it is on a dumbbell, swinging exercises such as this one are easier to perform.



positioned farther from the center of mass than it is on a dumbbell allows for several release movements (in which you let go of the handle at the completion of a repetition) and swinging exercises to be performed more easily and safely than with a dumbbell.

*Girya* is the Russian word for kettlebell. One of the earliest descriptions of a kettlebell appeared in a Russian dictionary published in 1704; and rather than being considered fitness tools, kettlebells were used in markets as counterweights. Eventually the Russian common folk invented ways to use them as exercise tools, and they became popular with the military and with athletes, especially throwers in track and field. It was also reported that Vasily Alexeyev, the Russian

weightlifting champion who became the first man to clean and jerk 500 pounds, used kettlebells in his training.

The popularity of kettlebell training led to the first competition taking place in 1948 in the USSR, and in 1985 a national kettlebell competition was held. It was called the USSR National Girevoy Sport Championship, and the events were the clean and jerk and the one-arm power snatch, performed for repetitions. The specific weights (which come in increments called *poods*) were 16, 24 and 32 kilos (or 35, 52 and 70 pounds), depending upon an athlete's classification. Further, individuals could earn a national ranking in *girevoy sport* by performing a specific number of repetitions with these weights.

There is also research available that shows the value of kettlebell training. A 1983 study involved a series of four tests: pull-ups, standing broad jump, 100-meter spring and the 1k run. One group performed a standard physical fitness program that included these tests; the other group performed only kettlebell exercises. The researchers found that the group that used the kettlebells achieved the best results in the post tests – and this was despite the subjects having not practiced these tests during training.

Virtually any exercise you can perform with a dumbbell you can perform with a kettlebell. When it comes time to expand your weightroom resources, consider picking up a few sets of kettlebells. BFS

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