



Sand Bags and Kettlebells for MMA Conditioning

The competitive fighter (or even the recreational fighter / grappler) need more than just conditioning. They need a program that will develop cardiovascular endurance that never quite, strength endurance to last the entire fight / match as well as power endurance to last the entire match / fight.

Improving one's overall conditioning via loaded movements is great for developing results that will help you dominate in competition as well! Why is conditioning with sand bags and kettlebells so great? For one, you are mimicking the true nature of your sport. Lifting and maneuvering a person through force is exactly what you have to do with the kettlebells and sand bags. Then, you match the time of your lifting with the amount of time you must perform for. Yes, sprints, jumping rope, etc are great for conditioning and should be part of the overall workout, but, you must condition yourself with the weights as well! You should not use weights only to gain strength and power.

Let's look at training with Kettlebells and Sandbags using a few different methods:

1. Supersets
2. Burpees
3. Circuits (more than 2 exercises)
4. Couplets (combining a sandbag or kettlebell exercise with a bodyweight movement)
5. Training for time / rounds

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Supersets kick ass because you can really push your body using supersets for antagonistic muscles (opposing muscles, i.e. chest & back) or for upper and lower body to get a full body workout.

A sample super set with kettlebells and sand bags would be 5 x 5 of double clean and press on KB's and 5 x 5 of sand bag squats. Start of by doing one exercise, rest a minute, then the next exercise, rest a minute, etc. until all sets are complete. Progress to doing two exercises back to back with no rest, then a minute after the two sets. Eventually, you want to do 5 sets of each exercise back to back with no rest at all! Get the bucket ready!



sand bag squats, below parallel, shown above

Burpees done with kettlebells or sand bags are tough as all heck as well. When we do burpees with a sandbag we incorporate all the movements: sprawl back, push ups, clean, squat and press. This combo of burpees is going to be awesome for full body conditioning and can be done when you are short on time (go for 5 sets of 10 reps) or do as many reps as possible in a 10 minute time frame!

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Burpees with kettlebells can be done with one or two kettlebells. One kettlebell makes it a bit easier for the newbie to kettlebells. Try the burpee high pull: sprawl back, jump forward stand tall and high pull the kettlebell. Perform a few sets of 10 – 20 reps or a few sets that last over 1 minute and up to 2 minutes!

Circuits are not to be confused with the need to train light. You can still go heavy on circuit training. Here is a sample circuit:

1. Sandbag bent over row x 8
2. 1 arm clean and press with kettlebell x 5 L / R
3. Sandbag RDL / Good morning hybrid x 8 reps

Perform the above circuit for 5 rounds minimum!



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above, the top of the 1 arm clean and press

Last but not least are the use of couplets. A loaded movement with a BW exercise. Do these back to back and push yourself to keep high reps. Some couplet examples are 2 arm swings and BW squats for 3 x 20 reps each, pull ups and double clean and press x 5 x 5 reps of each and dips and sand bag snatches for 3 rounds of 10 each. I go to a playground with high pull up bars and parallel bars and work a few variations of couplets for a killer conditioning workout.



above, the bottom of the sandbag snatch

below is the finish position



Last but not least is training for timed “rounds” which is heavily inspired by Cross Fit. Pick three exercises and perform as many sets as possible with a prescribed number of reps. You might have to do reps in descending fashion such as 21 reps on the first set, 15 on the next set and 9 reps per exercise on the last set. You record your time during these workouts and then try to better that time the next time around.

Here is a sandbag and kettlebell workout for three rounds, reps are 21,15 and 9. Record your time when finished.

1. Sand bag clean and press
2. 2 hand kettlebell swings
3. walking lunges with sand bag

With all the above variations you can surely kick your conditioning into high gear! It takes more than being motivated to do these workouts, you’ll need plenty of physical and mental toughness!

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Zach Even – Esh is a Strength & Performance Coach located in NJ. Learn more about old school training methods by visiting www.UndergroundStrengthCoach.com and get your free mini course on old school training when you sign up for the newsletter!

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