

Simple and Effective Kettlebell Training for Wing Tsun

with the Swing and Floor-Press
by Steve McMinn 1TG

A kettlebell you say?

A kettlebell is an over 300 year-old hand-held weight with an accompanying exercise system. Some people say it looks like a cannonball with a suitcase-style handle (see Figure 1.1).

Like the Wing Tsun system, the kettlebell exercise and strength system has only a few basic moves and concepts. Once the basics are mastered, the kettlebell lifter or Girevik (Rus.) is able to add whichever more advanced movements suit their training goals. In both systems, a proper understanding of the basic concepts is essential for getting the most out of the more advanced exercises.

An Example In Relation to Wing Tsun:

Without a high skill-level in basic chi-sau pressure-direction, the advanced Wooden Dummy form will instill incorrect pressure-direction (pushing sideways, up or down) away from the centerline. By the same token, without a high level of skill in the basic Kettlebell Swing, a girevik will not be able to generate enough hip-snap and abdominal/shoulder stabilization to perform advanced heavy Snatches without poor mechanics and a correspondingly high risk of serious and permanent injury!



Figure 1.1

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how and why the kettlebell is an ideal training partner/tool for strength and power development in Wing Tsun. That is not to say, dumbbells, barbells, bands and bodyweight training do not have their place in practical strength training. The kettlebell just happens to offer the most “bang for the buck” and gives the WT practitioner a simple and systematic way to train for strength and endurance, anytime and anywhere.

The kettlebell system we will be discussing here is known as Hard-Style. This system emphasizes maximal effort in all movements, forgoing energy conservation for maximal contraction, powerful breathing and structural integrity. It is different from the Sport Style in those respects, as this equally effective style is designed for longer duration sets in a competition setting.

Luke, I am your Fascial:

In order to understand one of the greatest benefits kettlebell training offers, we must look at the important role fascia-strength and balance play in our Wing Tsun.

Fascia can best be described as the soft tissue component of the connective tissue system permeating our whole bodies. Muscles, bones, organs, nerves, blood vessels and other structures are wrapped in one of three types of fascia. The particular type we are interested in is the Deep Fascia (Figure 2.1).

This is the web or net-like layer of tissue, composed of glue, fibre and water that our muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments are wrapped in. This Deep Fascia is able to stretch & compress and has an internal-memory, therefore all movements we perform affect the quality and health of this system. This includes of course both active (weight training, forms training, chi-sau) and passive (sitting at a computer, driving a car, watching WT videos) activities. It is therefore very important for us to strive for Deep Fascia balance and strength.

In WT, our Deep Fascia strength and balance, built through partner and wooden dummy training, allows us to maintain the proper posture and position to root force into the ground and also to deliver balanced and powerful attacks. Unfortunately, we all have bad habits like leaning back, leaning forward, lifting our shoulders, resisting with strength instead of position, and so on... These bad habits will form our malleable fascia into an unbalanced and therefore structurally-weak support-web around our muscles, bones, tendons and ligaments. Constant scrutiny and diligent correction of our form while training, is of course necessary to correct these bad habits and restore fascia balance and strength. Imagine though, if we could weight-train for WT and while doing so, reinforce these exact same correct and balanced movement patterns, giving additional time and volume (practice) to our already diligent training routine?

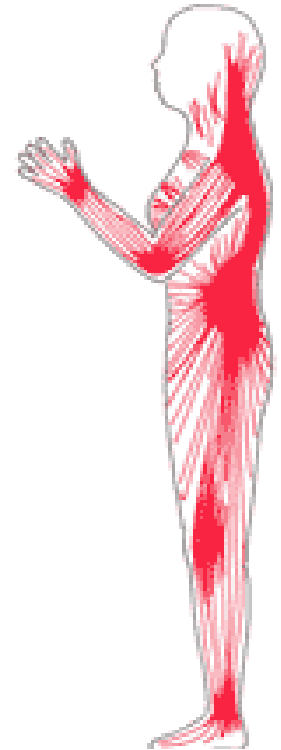
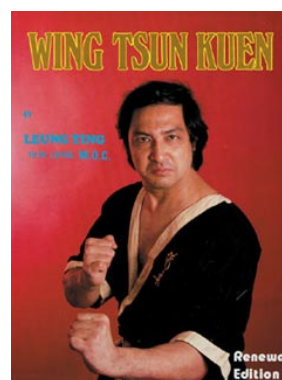


Figure 2.1

As Pavel Tsatsouline would say, “Enter The Kettlebell”!

It does bear to mention that Pavel’s book of the same name should be part of every kettlebell-training WT student’s library just like GM Leung Ting’s Wing Tsun Kuen!



Starting Strong - Picking up the Kettlebell:

Picking the kettlebell up and placing it back on the floor after lifting, is of paramount importance! Many injuries occur as the result of being lazy at the start and end of training movements. Imagine doing a powerful set of heavy Swings and then tweaking your back as you put the bell down at the end... not feeling so good about those Swings now, are you? The Kettlebell Deadlift, performed correctly, will save your back and your pride!

Figure 3.1 shows the correct form for the Kettlebell-Deadlift.



The Kettlebell Deadlift:

Start with a slightly wider than shoulder-width stance. Sit back as if you are trying to reach a chair about a foot behind you (movement starts with the hips), letting your weight rest on the heels. Keep looking forward so the upper back remains straight. You will feel the bell with your hands and do not need to look down! The arms are straight and loose, letting the legs do the lifting. Also, make sure your knees track over your toes, with the feet turned slightly outwards. At the top of the movement, straighten your legs and fully-contract your quads (pulling kneecaps up), fully contract your glutes and allow the hips

Figure 3.1 to tip back, contract your abs as if bracing for a punch, keep your shoulders back and down in the sockets.

The Swing's the thing...

As I mentioned earlier, the Kettlebell-Swing is the foundational exercise of the system. Let's discuss exactly how the Kettlebell-Swing will enhance your Wing Tsun performance.

Figures 4.1 – 4.3 show three stages of the Swing: the Hike-pass, the Hip-Snap and the Top-Position.



The Hike-Pass:

Start with the bell just behind your heels, making you reach for it and emphasize a straight back. Get one or two hands on the Kettlebell via the Deadlift. Ensure to push chin and tailbone away from each other, feeling a pull in the hamstrings. Same alignment applies when in motion. Make sure to push the bell back down using your lats, keeping shoulders firmly in the socket.

Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2

The Hip Snap:

Keeping your back straight, thrust up and forward with your hips. Your shoulders remain locked into the socket via the lats, and the blades squeezed together via the mid-traps and rhomboids. Remember to keep the arms loose, like a pair of ropes. The fingers hold the bell in a hook-grip.



Figure 4.3

The Top Position:

Quads maximally contract, pulling kneecaps up and straightening legs. Glutes fully contract, tipping your hips back and allowing for relaxation of the hip-flexors. Contract your abs fully, as if taking a punch, keeping ribs tucked in (like a partial crunch). Continue to fire your mid-traps and rhomboids to keep the shoulder blades together. Continue firing your lats to keep shoulders firmly in the sockets. Arms remain rope-loose, fingers hold the bell in a hook-grip. Lastly, keep your chin retracted (double chins) and neck in neutral.

Note: *There is no lifting of the bell with the shoulders when performing the swing. All of the power comes from the hip-drive. To easily correct lifting the bell, wrap a towel through the handle and swing holding the towel a few inches from the bell. At the top of the swing there should be a straight-line through your arms, hands, towel and the bell. This drill will really help you to feel that the bell's momentum comes only through the hip-drive.*

The Swing is the most basic ballistic kettlebell movement. This movement forms the basis of the other ballistic kettlebell movements like the Snatch and the Clean. The Swing requires you to hike-pass the bell behind you then explode to standing, locking your knees (quad contraction), squeezing your glutes & abs (hips tilted back – ribs tucked in) and pressing your shoulders into their sockets. All of this is done with relaxed rope-like arms and perfect spinal alignment. Right away, we notice the familiar glute-powered anterior hip-tilt and abdominal-powered rib-tuck essential for a powerful and rooted WT stance. This core-stabilizing movement also allows the WT practitioner to transfer force from his arms into a passive turn and/or an active stance-powered attack. Next we look at the straightening of the legs. The quad contraction to a straight knee-joint, while driving through the heel works the same muscular pattern as in our WT Thrusting Kicks. The spinal erectors, trapezius and rhomboid contractions are responsible for our upright WT stance as are the contractions of the chin-retracting suboccipitals and deep neck flexors. The trapezius muscles also assist the lats in keeping the shoulders back, down and in the socket, exactly the position they must occupy in order to allow us to transfer force down into our stance. The loose joint at the elbow with corresponding light-tension in the hook-grip almost exactly mimics the pattern needed to throw a powerful WT punch. Since the Deep Fascial layer is directly affected by the way we position our bodies actively and passively, the Swing's posture-correcting and powerful muscular contractions will also restore strength and balance to this layer, encasing our bones, joints and muscles in the most structurally sound manner

You can see now how useful just this one exercise can be to your WT training!

A great way to incorporate Swings into your WT practice is to use Circle-Steps and punches as your recovery between sets. The common movement and contraction/relaxation patterns make this a perfect pair. After we get through the Floor Press, I will present a simple Swing and Press training plan to put it all into action!

The Floor Press for Striking-Power!

Our strikes are supported by the lats, rhomboids and traps but are powered mainly by the triceps and to a degree the pectorals (chest). In order to work the triceps and pecs for striking, we turn to the Kettlebell Floor-Press.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the Start and Finish of the KB Floor Press.



Start Position:

Lie on the floor with your knees up and feet on the floor, the bell beside you just below your shoulder on the weak side. Roll your body towards the bell and bring it to the Press start position using both hands (shoulder safety). Squeeze your shoulder blades

Figure 5.1 together and press your shoulders down and into the socket, keeping this position for the duration of the set. Make sure to squeeze the glutes and keep the ribs tucked in (low back moves towards the floor).



Figure 5.2

Finish Position:

Exhale as you Press the bell to elbow-lockout, keeping the wrist straight. It helps to visualize pushing your body down and away from the bell. Lower with control and repeat. To make this Press even more WT-specific, “turn” the elbow into the lockout as we do with our punches and palm-strikes.

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show the Start and Finish of the Bottom-Up Press.



Figure 6.1

Bottom-Up Floor Press:

Using a lighter bell held bottom-up will help to strengthen your wrist for a more structurally-sound punch as well as provide additional grip-training. Make sure to have your other hand ready to stabilize the bell should it tip to the side. This Press requires a greater amount of concentration and puts you at a higher risk of dropping the bell!



Figure 6.2

As with the Swing, in **The Press** we see the glute-powered anterior pelvic-tilt and abdominal –powered rib-tuck common to our structurally sound WT stance and body-position. We also focus again on safe and strong shoulder mechanics, a necessary element of striking-power and the ability to transfer external force from our arms into our stance or turn. Pressing while lying on our back ensures we develop the exact force-direction needed for powerful strikes. A common mistake when trying to increase striking power is to stand up and throw punches while holding dumbbells. This movement mostly works the front and sides of the shoulder and only very minimally adds strength to the triceps and chest. That being said, slow and heavy Thrusting-Punches with a decent weight will make your WT-wedge much stronger and make it harder for an opponent to press your arms down and against your body (material for another article perhaps :).

A Simple Plan for Training:

Now that we have explored the Swing and Floor-Press in detail, let's put it all together in a simple and time-saving training program. This program template is taken pretty much directly from Pavel Tsatsouline's *Enter The Kettlebell*.

To determine the weight of bell to start with, pick one you can Floor-Press five to eight times. Start by pressing once with your weak arm, pass the bell behind your head, and press once with the strong arm. Repeat this for two reps and then three per side. You have now done three ladders for a total of 18 reps. Add one ladder the next week and one the week after that. Stay with 5 ladders from then on.

The top rung should be getting hard but do not train to failure! The goal is to use the cycling of the ladders to dramatically increase your volume while minimizing fatigue so you can press more often and therefore get stronger. That being said, you must determine your ideal rest times between sets.

The fourth week, add another rung to each ladder (4 presses). Stay with this format until you can comfortably do 5 ladders of 4 reps. Once you can do this, add one more rung and work up to 5 ladders of 5 reps. Once you can do this you're ready to move up to the next bell and start all over again!

The training is split into three days and three intensity levels (Easy, Medium and Hard). You can choose the days, depending on your own personal schedule. It would be best to leave one day in between each Kettlebell session for active recovery. This can be any activity that is different from lifting... like practicing your WT for example!

Here is an example of how your first week could look with a Monday (Hard), Wednesday (Medium), Friday (Easy) schedule:

Monday: Floor-Press (1,2,3) x3 – Swings for 12 minutes (as many as you can)

Wednesday: Floor Press (1,2) x 3 – Swings for 12 minutes (70-80% of Monday)

Friday: Floor Press (1) x 3 – Swings for 12 minutes (50-60% of Monday)

As I mentioned earlier, do Circle-Steps and Chain-Punches as your active rest between sets of Swings. You will really feel the physical relationship between both of these movement patterns!

***Note:** It is very important to keep moving when your heart-rate is elevated from exercise and you are trying to cool-down. The muscles in your arms and legs will help pump blood throughout the body, taking some of the stress off your heart and allowing for quicker and more real-world recovery.*

Enjoy your Kettlebell Training for Wing Tsun!

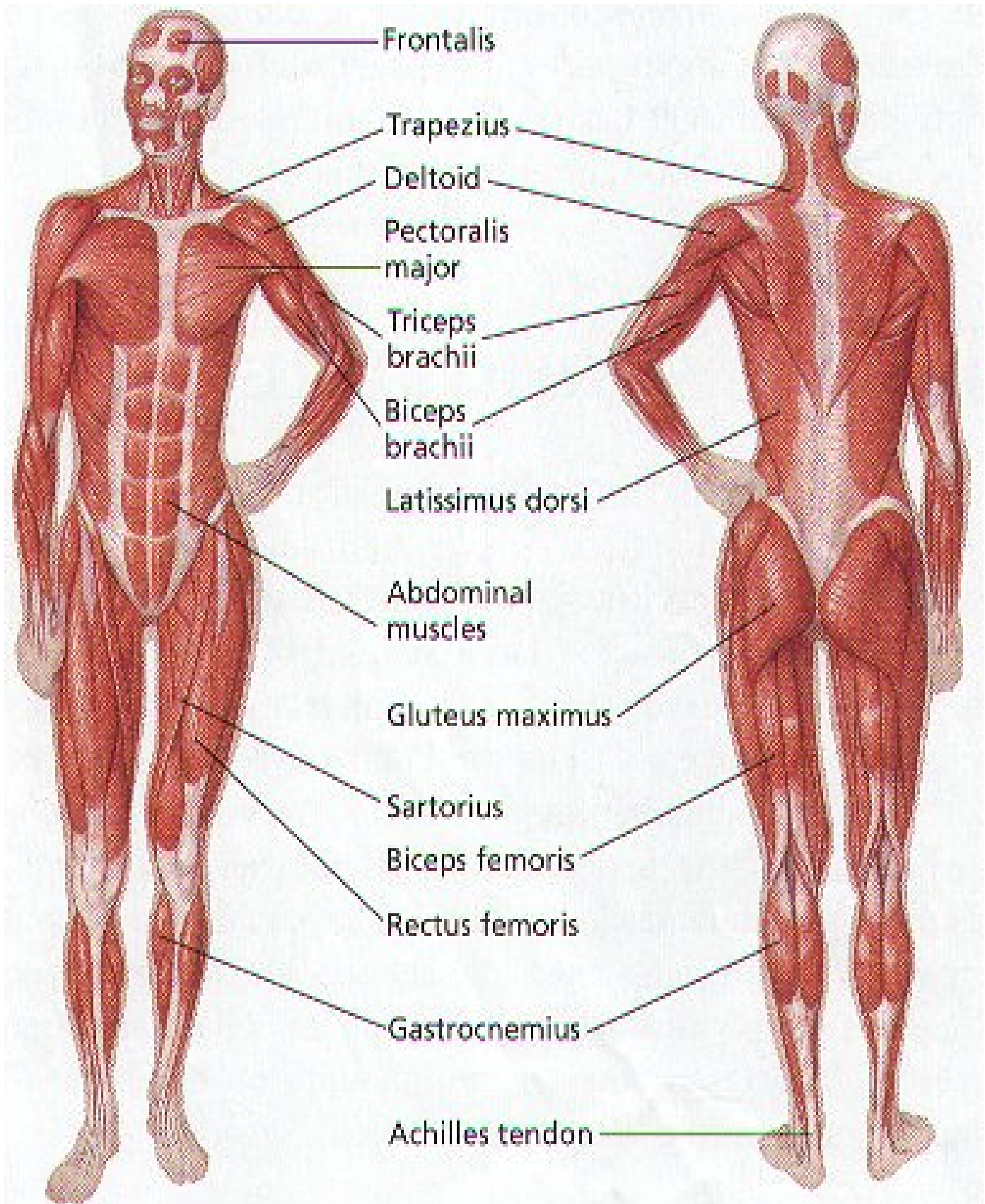


Figure 7.1 – Human Muscle Anatomy Diagram