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Viking Warrior Conditioning

The scientific approach to forging a heart of elastic steel: An application of the theory behind proper VO2max training

By Kenneth Jay

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"Pain is temporary.
It may last a minute,
or an hour,
or a day, or a year,
but eventually
it will subside
and something else
will take its place.

If I quit, however,
it lasts forever."

– Lance Armstrong

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Introduction

Back in ancient Greece, in the days of the battle at the Hot Gates, human beings had superior genetics compared to people in this lifetime. A couple of years ago, an experiment was conducted across history. Exercise physiologists, engineers, and historians from several universities across Europe set out to determine the level of conditioning that these heroes of ancient times possessed. An historical analysis of information on these men's training, ability to sail ships, and ability to cover great distances by foot while wearing armor showed that the cardiovascular endurance and strength of the average man would be hard, if not impossible, to match today, even among world-level athletes. It would be hard today to find enough world-class athletes in the entire world to row a *single replica* of an ancient battleship at the same speed and for the same duration as men from the past were able to do. Today, we would not stand a chance against these men. Our genetics have changed, and we are in the worst shape ever!

It is not a coincidence that the men of the past were in such excellent cardiovascular health. Training and fighting a lot requires being able to exert sustained force and generate great acceleration *while* being under tremendous cardiovascular stress. This is the secret of ancient Viking warrior conditioning.

The key to the performance level of the glory days is right in front of us. The kettlebell will deliver a heart of elastic steel with superior flexibility and contractile force generation.

I urge you to reclaim the past! Take a stand and gain the heart of a racehorse with the strength of a grizzly. That would make the heroes of the past proud.

In the immortal words of Pavel Tsatsouline:

"If you don't know how, I'll teach you.
If you don't want to, I'll make you!"

Foreword

by Mark Reifkind
Master Instructor RKC

It's not often in the world of physical training that something comes along so special, so unique, and so effective that it causes a paradigm shift in how people train and think about training. Louie Simmons turned the powerlifting world upside down with his inspired reinvention of how to train the powerlift. Pavel did the same thing and more with the Russian Kettlebell Challenge. And now, Master RKC Kenneth Jay has taken the Tsar of the Kettlebell lifts—the kettlebell snatch—and created a method of training so revolutionary that it causes us to rethink *everything* we thought we knew about cardiovascular training and how to incorporate it into our strength and conditioning programs.

Kenneth has looked at the true meaning of cardiovascular adaptation and configured a kettlebell-training program to elicit that response for real. As I told him when we were discussing the benefits I had derived from this, "The VO2max training delivers what circuit training only promised: real strength and cardiovascular conditioning in the same package. With NO compromises."

I remember sitting in the auditorium at the Level 2 RKC Certification when Kenneth unveiled this new regime and I heard him speak about building a heart of "elastic steel" using only the 16 kg kettlebell. I was able to snatch the 24 kg bell quite well at the time but was still suffering from shoulder issues that precluded me from really going all out with it. My powerlifter's mindset would not allow me to use lighter bells, as that would be "too sissy," to quote a top-level Russian Kettlebell Chief Instructor. But as a volume-training addict, the program intrigued me.

I was even more intrigued when I got to witness the RKC candidates being put through their paces in this new way of using the kettlebell. It looked brutal but quite safe—a great combination for this high-mileage, ex-competitive athlete. I had to try it as soon as I got back home. And what an eye-opener it was!

Having gotten permission to use a lighter bell, I felt quite safe focusing on moving the weight as quickly as I could during the snatches and trying to do the prescribed number of sets and reps. Trying is the operative word. I stopped counting when my heart rate topped 190 and I wasn't even