

Putting A Steel into your Swing

Jon Engum, Master RKC

A sharp knife requires a steel to keep the edge in fine cutting condition. You may already know the term "steel" is a metal rod used to put a fine edge on knives. As a small boy watching my grandfather expertly wield his in a whirlwind of steel vs. knife he would, as a maestro conducting a symphony, turn a dull and dangerous knife into a finely honed obsidian sharp precision cutting tool. Grandpa knew a thing or two about sharpening knives, in his heyday he was considered by many as the godfather of the North American Fur Industry and at one point he had the largest Mink Ranch in the U.S. A sharp knife was critical when working with valuable pelts, both for safety and efficiency.

Let's take that and put a fine polished edge on your swing. Knives and swings both get dull with use. Keep your tools sharp! Coaches, please note this is not for rank beginners. Just as a steel is not to be used to sharpen an extremely dull blade, a grind stone is used first to get the general shape of the edge and then the steel puts on the finishing touches. In other words, what I am about to describe is appropriate for someone who has the basic idea of the swing already and is looking to take things to the next level, or for someone who has become "lazy" with their swing. Let me explain what I mean by lazy. The human body always tries to figure out a more efficient way of doing receptive work, whether it is running, throwing, kicking or swinging. Perhaps it is a survival mechanism but finding the path of least resistance is not really desirable in your swing practice. Make your conditioning as hard as possible in order to make your sport performance as easy as it can be.

One more thing should be noted before I describe the Steel Lesson plan. I have chosen to use the term "lesson" instead of workout for a very precise reason. You should not go into your training thinking of having a workout. A workout brings to mind a panting and wheezing, sweat-drenched torture session that you try to survive, then crawl off the mat and lick your wounds. I will liken a workout to a story that does not have a moral...mindless entertainment for sure, but did you learn anything? Instead of just being a typical meathead, I encourage you to become a thinking man or woman and have a lesson built into to every training session. What was the moral of the story? And sometimes just, sometimes the moral can be how to survive a panting, wheezing, sweat-drenched torture session ;) .

By the way, you will leave this lesson, panting, wheezing and drenched in sweat, but that is just a cool side effect not the main lesson.

All of my stories have a moral.

So with out further ado here is the **Putting Steel to your Swing** lesson plan.

We will take two familiar RKC Swing drills and combine them to make a very cool lasting impression on your swing. Ok, but first...

Step 1

Loosen up with some joint rotations and mobility drills.

Step 2

Practice some two handed swings, something like this:

20 swings

Fast and loose hand shake outs

20 swings

Fast and loose arm and shoulder shake outs

20 swings

Fast and loose leg shake outs

20 swings

Fast and loose hip and glute shake outs

20 swings

Fast and loose full body shake outs

Perform the above with a partner. While one does the swings the other does the fast and loose practice.

100 swings as done in the above method should have your juices flowing but not so much as to leave you cooked...we will save that for later. Most important is you and your partner should have a good feel for the base line of your swing...while you were doing the fast and loose part you were slightly observing your partners form and vice-versa.

Steeling the Swing Part 1

The clip board drill is a trouble shooting drill used to help the student learn how to load the hamstrings. The directions below taken from the RKC manual:

"Hold a clipboard a foot or so behind him and instruct him to hit it with the Kettlebell on every back swing. Hold the clipboard high to make the student hike straight back rather than down".

The student will practice the clipboard drill for around twenty reps per set. It is a good idea to let the student reach the clip board easily to start with and then more challenging by progressively moving the target further and further back.

Clipboard practice 3 sets of 20

Steeling the Swing Part 2

Overspeed eccentric spiked swing practice. Often used as an alternate drill form the above to encourage hamstring loading it may at first appear to be a redundant practice but the overspeed spike does way more than just teach one to load the hams. The spike fixes much of what is wrong with a resistant swing and goes a long way toward making the swing "Hard style".

Again from the RKC Manual, "Having warned the student, on the second gently push the Kettlebell back between the student's legs. Carefully guide it high, close to the groin, and straight back. Push harder and harder from rep to rep, within reason."

After about ten reps when your partner is "getting it", stop spiking the bell and instruct them to "spike" themselves. Terminate the set when it looks right and before they run out of steam.

It is important to heed the advice of starting out gently. I witnessed on RKC candidate who was enamored with this drill spike his victim so hard right out of the gate that she did a front flip. Needless to say he failed the course and shall remain unnamed to protect the guilty. Start easy and build up steam.

Practice in the you go/I go format, 3 setw of 15 to 20 swings. Remember only the first part of the set will be spike and last part will be self-induced spiking.

Steeling the Swing part 3

The Kettlebell Sandwich

Ok, you may think what is the big deal? Nothing new here. Well patience grasshopper, good things come to those who wait. I have set the ground work for the next and final stage of the sharpening process that will reveal itself momentarily.

The problem which each of the afore mentioned great drills is that they are for the most part one dimensional. But we operate in a three dimensional world. You get the back side of the swing looking good and the front falls apart, fix the hip hinge and the student no longer finishes his lock out. Get the lockout popping and the hips hinging and then the shoulders unpack. What to do? Back in the mid seventies a Hungarian named Erno Rubik has the same problem at the Academy of Applied Arts and Crafts in Budapest. He was trying to get his students to understand 3D objects. He came up with a learning tool to solve the "structural problem of moving the parts independently without the entire

mechanism falling apart". The Rubiks Cube was born. I am sure most of you remember playing with this maddening device. It was fairly easy to get one side of the cube solved but as soon as you begin work on the rest of the puzzle the whole thing came undone. To solve it you had to think globally. The same is true with the swing. By the way there is nothing more Rubikonian than the Getup, but I digress.

The solution to this conundrum is the Kettlebell Sandwich.

Divide up into groups of 3.

One partner will be behind the swinger holding the clip board.

One partner will be in front spiking the Kettlebell.

The monkey in the middle swinging the bell will be the meat of the sandwich.

The lucky dog in the center will be spiked from the front and clip boarded from the back and generally run through the wringer.

The clip board person is also responsible for making sure the swinger contracts his glutes at the lockout by occasionally tapping them with the clip board.

The round goes like this:

30 seconds of being worked over by the front and back tag team. 15 seconds trying to produce the same feeling by yourself. 15 seconds to rotate roles. Clipboard person becomes the spiker, spiker becomes the swinger, and swinger becomes clip board person. Rotate through this cycle for 15 minutes, each person will get 5 minutes of practice in total with a 1 to 2 work rest ratio.

You will see a dramatic sharpness in your swing you will also notice this is not your Grandmas swing practice. Now crawl off the mat a panting, wheezing, sweat soaked sharper swinger and contemplate the moral of the story...Steel sharpens steel.